



784.9 D77s  
Drew  
Singing

60-09137

kansas city



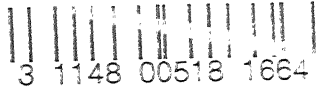
public library

kansas city, missouri

Books will be issued only  
on presentation of library card.

Please report lost cards and  
change of residence promptly.

Card holders are responsible for  
all books, records, films, pictures  
or other library materials  
checked out on their cards.



MAI 1985

STATION

MAI 1985

MAI 1985

MAI MAY 15 1985

MAI APR 19 '88

MAI APR 26 1988

MAI JAN 07 1996

MAI AUG 13 1996









# SINGING

*The Art and the Craft*



# SINGING

## *The Art and the Craft*

BY  
W. S. DREW

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

1937

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
AMEN HOUSE, E.C. 4  
London Edinburgh Glasgow New York  
Toronto Melbourne Capetown Bombay  
Calcutta Madras  
HUMPHREY MILFORD  
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

## PREFACE

THE greater part of the Chapters upon Poetry and upon Meaning were read as papers to the Society of English Singers and were afterwards published in the *Musical Times*. Chapters I, IV, VI, VII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, and XIV have also appeared in that paper, and I wish to express my especial thanks to the editor, Dr. Harvey Grace, for giving, in a paper primarily devoted to music, a prominent place to matter which did not appear superficially to have a direct connexion with music. The chapter upon Spoken English appeared in a somewhat more controversial form in the *Dominant*, to the editor of which my thanks are also due.

I should like to acknowledge here the debt which I owe to the work which has been done in America of late years on the acoustics and psychology of the voice and hearing. Professor D. C. Miller's *The Science of Musical Sounds*, with its excellent bibliography, and also the Psychological Monographs of the University of Iowa, have been especially useful.





# CONTENTS

PREFACE . . . . .	v
INTRODUCTORY NOTE . . . . .	ix
I. AN INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDE . . . . .	i
II. POETRY AND ITS MUSICAL SETTINGS . . . . .	10
III. THE POSTULATES OF ART . . . . .	19
IV. IMITATION AND SUGGESTION . . . . .	27
V. MEANING IN SPEECH AND SONG . . . . .	42
VI. ART AND LIFE, THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND INTERDEPENDENCE . . . . .	53
§ 1. <i>Mainly Analytic</i> . . . . .	53
§ 2. <i>Mainly Synthetic</i> . . . . .	62
VII. THE ENGLISH VOICE . . . . .	75
VIII. SPOKEN ENGLISH . . . . .	88
IX. MUSIC WITHOUT LETTERS . . . . .	99
X. THE SINGER'S EAR . . . . .	106
XI. THE COMPLEXITY OF SINGING . . . . .	114
XII. ACOUSTICS AND SINGING . . . . .	124
XIII. RHYTHM . . . . .	137
XIV. SOME PRINCIPLES OF TRAINING . . . . .	157



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THIS book has been written primarily, but by no means exclusively, for those interested in the art of singing. Even if it dealt solely with singing, the detailed examination of this art could not fail to throw some light upon the principles of art in general. Singing is, however, a composite art and has a very close connexion with poetry and with acting, so that an inquiry into the nature of singing is much helped by some consideration of these arts.

The main line of approach to the matter is always from the mind of the person to whom the art is addressed—that of impression, not expression. A child's shout of joy or excitement may be a very adequate expression but it is not necessarily for that reason a work of art; for it by no means always arouses corresponding feelings in the minds of those who hear it.

For this reason if some of the 'moderns' were to call their creations works of expression instead of works of art no one would have any reasonable cause for complaint. The members of certain religious bodies are liable under the influence of strong emotion to pour forth a stream of unintelligible vocal sound. Far be it from me to say that such utterances are valueless, but the examination candidate who was asked to put them into Latin hexameters would probably feel that he was not being fairly treated. In fact, a good many artistic and philosophical puzzles that people set themselves will either be solved, or be dissipated into the vaporous shams that they really are, by the application of a suitable practical test.

The book falls naturally into two sections, and those whose business or hobby is singing may find it more interesting to begin with the section from Chapter VII

to Chapter XIV, and read the general part, Chapters I to VI, afterwards.

A certain amount of repetition has been inevitable in a book which treats of both theory and practice, but the repetition is, for the most part, of things that need stressing.

## CHAPTER I

### AN INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDE

You will never convince a man, who is not accustomed to Italian music and has not an ear to follow its intricacies, that a Scots tune is not preferable. You have not even any single argument, beyond your own taste, which you can employ in your behalf; and to your antagonist his particular taste will always appear a more convincing argument to the contrary. If you be wise, each of you will allow that the other may be in the right; and having many other instances of this diversity of taste, you will both confess that beauty and worth are merely of a relative nature, and consist in an agreeable sentiment, produced by an object in a particular mind according to the peculiar structure and constitution of that mind.

HUME'S ESSAYS, *The Sceptic*.

In the pit first begins that accursed critical faculty, which, making a man a judge of his own pleasures, too often constitutes him the executioner of his own and others. . . . Still now and then a *genuine spectator* is to be found among them, a shopkeeper and his family, whose honest titillations of mirth, and generous chucklings of applause, cannot wait or be at leisure to take the cue from the sour judging faces about them. . . . I love the unenquiring gratitude of such spectators.

CHARLES LAMB, *Playhouse Memoranda*.

SINCE the value of any work of art must depend ultimately upon the effect which it has on those to whom it is addressed, it follows that every sincere person who enters a picture gallery or concert-room, or who sits down to read a poem, has his own *artistic* criticism ready to hand; for if he does not know whether he likes what he sees, hears, or reads, it is not easy to see how any one else can tell him, though a great number of people will be ready to tell him what he 'ought' to like.

A criticism of the purely *artistic* merits of a work must always take a form of this kind: 'This work produces on me such and such an effect.' To begin with, the criticism must always be personal and subjective, because it is manifestly impossible to judge with certainty the effect that any work of art will have on others. Two sensitive and intelligent people may often be heard expressing diametrically opposite opinions about the same play, poem, or picture.

'I like this' is a judgement from which there is no appeal, though it is sometimes the subject of caustic comment from a self-constituted court of highbrows; but 'this is good' or 'that is bad' are statements of opinion which have to be supported from general principles which are agreed upon beforehand. No one need waste time in trying to prove a geometrical proposition to some one who refused to admit that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another or who maintained that things which are greater than the same thing are greater than one another.

Arguments about art are often just this sort of waste of time, but even this is not the end of the matter, because experience, associations, and imagination vary so greatly in different people that two critics might be in perfect agreement about the principles upon which a given work should be judged and yet come to very different conclusions about it. The same work of art seems able to meet with the approval of some people, to arouse disgust in others, and to be a matter of indifference to a third group; and listening to these conflicting opinions sometimes puts one's faith in the sincerity of some or all of the critics to a severe test.<sup>1</sup>

Tolstoy seeks to escape from the difficulty by denying the title 'good' to any work of art which cannot be understood by the generality of mankind. This sweeping generalization has the merit of consigning to the dust-bin a good deal of rubbish that we could well do without, but I for one should like the opportunity of picking over the heap before it found its way to the municipal destructor. Even the simplest-minded Russian agricultural labourer cannot escape from the personal attitude towards his fairy-story, fable, or ikon, so I do not intend to be deprived of mine by Tolstoy or even by Max Beer-

<sup>1</sup> 'In the perusal of a book or a picture, much of the impression that we receive depends upon the habit of mind that we bring with us to such perusal. The same circumstances may make one person laugh which shall render another very serious; or in the same person the first impression may be corrected by an afterthought.' Charles Lamb, *The Genius of Hogarth*.

bohm, who makes such capital fun of Zuleika Dobson's artistic creed: 'I don't understand music, but I know what I like.' The understanding of art consists exactly in that—knowing what you like. Understanding the technique of art is quite another matter. When a critic confines himself to matters of technique pure and simple he is on fairly safe ground and is also in the comfortable position of being able to disguise his opinion of the artistic merit of a work till a large number of sincere people have expressed their opinion on it.

Every one knows, though critics often forget, that the main object of all art is to appeal through the senses to the imagination and to certain kinds of memory: not to appeal directly to the senses. But since the imagination is appealed to through the senses, purely sensuous pleasure, or some kind of affection of the senses, is almost inevitably bound up with the enjoyment of any art.

The proportion of imaginative activity to sensuous pleasure varies greatly. The amount of direct pleasurable effect on the senses when reading poetry to oneself is negligible, whereas in music it is often very large; and in this art, especially when it is combined with poetry in song, we find plainly shown that the sensuous stimulation often has the effect of rendering the recipient more susceptible to the effects of specific stimuli to the imagination.

The matter is further complicated by the fact that a fine work of art has what may be called a secondary effect on the senses: the stimulation of memory and imagination being sometimes so intense that there results that familiar 'tightening' of the skin or quickening of the pulse. As these effects may easily be felt when reading poetry (on occasions when the beauty of the printed page can certainly not be held responsible), it is plain that this action on the senses is the result of the activity of the imagination and not the cause of it.

Much harm has been done to the understanding of art by the prevalent habit of concentrating attention

upon the artist, or upon his work as a kind of independent objective entity, to the exclusion of what is at least of equal importance, namely the psychological processes of those to whom the art is addressed. Popular catch-phrases such as 'artistic temperament', 'power of personality', and others, tend to have the same effect of focusing attention on the artist, who, by the nature of the case, is not likely on his own account to do much to avoid this psychological lime-light. The same thing is found in biography, sometimes in a more irritating or even disgusting form. When a man has produced great works of art people are apparently never satisfied till all the details of his domestic life have been brought to light. The trouble is often started by the misguided hero-worshippers who suppose that greatness in a special faculty is necessarily associated with greatness of character. This irritates the sincere or the cynical historian, who thereupon insists upon an exhumation and post-mortem examination. By this time every one is well started on the 'human interest' business, and the art-student who wishes to know how the man studied, where and from whom he learnt his technique, and how he practised to perfect it, can find these things, if indeed they can be found at all, only by wading through pages of irrelevant and boring scandal-material. Such things suit the convenience of those publishers and editors who find that it pays from time to time to fling a carcass to the numerous vultures among the so-called art-loving public; but the cause of the understanding of art is not thereby advanced. And when we turn for aid to the autobiographies of successful artists we find that they often mistake their book for another stage, upon which they strut or sing with much less success than upon the one proper to their original art.

In the world of art both popular superstition and irresponsible criticism are full of the suggestion that those who are incapable of deep feelings themselves cannot possibly be expected to arouse them in other people. It is difficult to know where to start trying to



disentangle such a muddle,<sup>1</sup> but it may be worth while here to draw attention to one or two facts. Seeing the emotion of anger suggested on the stage does not make the audience angry; that is to say, not unless it is very badly done. In ordinary life a good many people know that a dull, foolish person may arouse in some one more sensitive a subtle irritation of which the former himself is alike unconscious and incapable. A beautiful woman, with the outward and visible signs of graces which she by no means possesses, may arouse in an idealistic lover just that quality and intensity of feeling that she herself is especially unfitted to feel. The possessor of the face that launched a thousand ships had probably less to do with it than a homely modern princess, for she at least presses a button.

If these things are true in ordinary life it is curious that the corresponding phenomena in art so often escape notice. The artist's nature and feelings are not of primary importance—except those that are included in that particular kind of intelligence and sensitiveness of observation which enable him to judge the best ways of reaching the imagination of other people by the means which his technique puts at his command.

The communication of thought from one person to another by means of words is a more difficult process than is popularly supposed; its precision is always marred by the different associations which are inevitably bound up with the experiences of different individuals.

A single word will often arouse very different trains of thought in different people, and psychologists can use this fact as a method of making a rough classification of different types of mind. Luckily, however, as soon as words are combined into sentences the range of variation in thought is narrowed, and the object of all sentence-making in any discussion of a scientific nature—such as the one we are now engaged upon—is to choose the words and their arrangement so as to leave the least freedom possible on the part of the hearer or reader in

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI on 'Art and Life'

the interpretation of them. It is not necessary to enlarge upon these difficulties to any one who has had experience of lecturing to a normally constituted audience and also the opportunity of listening to their versions of his views afterwards.

But, whether this thought-transference be difficult or easy, no one is likely to deny that the object of all language is to arouse certain states of consciousness in the mind of the recipient. It is plain that art is included in such a definition of language. Whereas, however, the main object of scientific language is to narrow the range of interpretation, art-language is largely concerned with something very nearly the reverse. The lyric invitation 'Come unto these yellow sands' is not concerned with the precise shade of yellow or with the exact geographical locality which in scientific language would be implied by the word 'these': you get your stimulus and take your choice—or, better still, you do not bother, but resign your imagination to pleasurable recollection.

These considerations will show us that when a statue is to be erected in a public place with public funds any member of the selection-committee has two questions to ask himself; one being whether it is a good work of art according to his own ideas, and the other, whether it is likely to be understood by the people to whom it is addressed and by whom it has been paid for. An examination of our public statues in England seems to show that one or other of these questions is sometimes forgotten.

Those who are not artists themselves sometimes make excellent critics of art because their attention is not distracted from the artistic merit of a work by considering its technique. It is difficult for one artist to consider the work of another without being interested in the means by which the other produces his effects. The critic ignorant of technique is interested in the effect alone; and the essence of art is effect, not method. The pleasure given by considering the skill of an artist

is a pleasure distinct from that which is obtained from the result of his skill, and happy are those who can keep them so and not allow their interest in the one to kill their pleasure in the other.

If we consider a form of art such as an orchestral symphony it is plain that the technical construction gives an immense field for criticism; on the other hand, the effects of the music itself on the mind are particularly difficult—if not impossible—to describe with any accuracy, partly on account of their vagueness and partly because the sources of the pleasure obtained from music are so varied and mixed. And as rhythm, melody, harmony, form, and tone-quality each appeal in different degrees to different people, it is not to be wondered at that very divergent views are to be heard from 'musical' people about the same work.

We shall do well to begin by considering something very much simpler: a child's attitude towards a fairy-story; for here, owing to the complete absence of the second, we shall find clearly indicated the difference between artistic pleasure and interest in technique.

There is a story by O. Henry called *A Chaparral Prince*, which—though it has a happy ending, out of deference, perhaps, to the magazine reader—rivals in pathos *Das verlassene Mägdelein* of Mörike and Wolf. This is an extract from it:

Always at night, however tired she might be, she had turned to Grimm for comfort and hope. Each time had Grimm whispered to her that the prince or the fairy would come and deliver her out of the wicked enchantment. Every night she had taken fresh courage and strength from Grimm.

To whatever tale she read she found an analogy in her own condition. The woodcutter's lost child, the unhappy goose girl, the persecuted step-daughter, the little maiden in the witch's hut—all these were but transparent disguises for Lena, the overworked kitchen-maid in the Quarrymen's Hotel. And always when the extremity was direst came the good fairy or the gallant prince to the rescue.

We may fairly assume that Lena, in company with

other children—she was only eleven years old—was not much preoccupied with the technique of the brothers Grimm. The fairy-tale aroused her imagination in the only field possible, namely the experiences of childhood with its hopes and fears.

From time to time there arises some crack-brained controversy as to whether fairies exist and whether children should be taught to believe that they do by being told fairy-stories. The 'ayes' drag in Shakespeare, I forget what particular grimace the 'noes' make to frighten him away. But one of his creations, Puck, before he retreats from the asphyxiating atmosphere of this inane debate will probably have enough breath left to murmur his line most appropriate to the occasion.

Anyway, Lena's mistress took away her volume of Grimm, not on account of any enthusiasm for or against fairies, but because 'it does not do for servants to read at night'. She thus deprived her poor little drudge of the purely artistic pleasure so neatly indicated by O. Henry.

To talk about a child's interest in a fairy-tale as 'a purely artistic pleasure' may surprise those who are inclined to think that artistic pleasures can only come to those who are educated and trained to receive them. A moment's consideration, however, will show that children are especially fitted to receive such pleasure: it is only necessary to make sure that the symbols used to arouse it are of the kind that they are likely to understand. The pleasure that a child gets from Grimm is of the same kind as that which a more mature person may get from Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind'. As far as intensity goes it would be difficult to compare them; for the rest they differ only in complexity, not in nature.

Let me borrow once again the unintentionally subtle remark of Max Beerbohm's brainless beauty, Miss Dobson. For I, personally, 'do not understand' poetry (i.e. its technique) 'but I know what I like' (artistically). I read a great deal of poetry and get much pleasure from it, but read it like a child, unconscious of its technique.

I had read perhaps a hundred or so of sonnets before I paid any attention to their construction; and the ability to quote largely, or even completely, from many of them has not taught me where they are divided or which line rhymes with which—though a second-rate poem sometimes forces its technique upon the attention. This may be regarded perhaps as an uninteresting personal revelation, but it is also an illustration of the fact that a high degree of artistic appreciation may exist independently of any interest in technique.

This capacity of entering the kingdom of poetry, or of any art, as a little child, is in some ways an enviable one. In other ways it is not. For cultivated people, the various strands of interest and pleasure become closely interwoven into a complex appreciation of art, where the different kinds of pleasure are by no means mutually destructive and may be mutually helpful.

We may distinguish between artistic pleasure—chiefly concerned with the imagination—aesthetic pleasure—more closely connected with the senses—and interest in technique—an intellectual pleasure.

A picture may be stimulating without being decorative, or vice versa; or it may be both. Music is often decorative without being stimulating in any specific way: that is one of the reasons why it so often seeks the aid of words and scenes, or lends its aid to the dance.

It may be thought unnecessary to narrow down the term 'artistic pleasure' to include only one of these, since they may all be obtained from the same work of art. This is, however, merely a matter of nomenclature, and whatever be the names given to them it is probable that those who can attain (and retain) in any art a nicely proportioned balance between interest in technique, aesthetic pleasure, and imaginative activity are the fortunate ones who obtain the maximum pleasure from it.

And it is certain that the writers who do not keep in mind a clear distinction of the various parts of this complicated human activity are those who arrive at the maximum of confusion in their discussion of it.

## CHAPTER II

### POETRY AND ITS MUSICAL SETTINGS

ALL of us, by the time we have come to maturity, have experienced an immense number and variety of colours, sounds, stresses, and sense-impressions in general, and have also been subjected in varying degrees to all the different emotions that harass or hearten our existence. It is to the memory of such impressions and experiences and their attendant moods that the artist makes his appeal. Perhaps the most powerful of all such appeals is through the medium of words in the form of poetry.

Poetry, however, is not likely to appeal to those who have not sensitive memories for the simpler forms of experience and who are not at the same time endowed with that power of rearrangement of ideas which is called imagination—though it must be admitted that it would be possible for some one to be highly endowed in these respects and yet to be so constituted that words and phrases did not happen to be the right stimuli to set his imagination working. And thus it comes about that some of us like poetry and some do not—that is, like it enough to read it fairly often, for there is hardly any one who could not be persuaded to confess that he liked one or two poems.

Let us consider part of the attendant fairy's remarks to Puck:

The cowslips tall her pensioners be;  
In their gold coats spots you see;  
Those be rubies, fairy favours,  
In those freckles live their savours.

If there be such a one as a matter-of-fact person (a matter-of-fact person being in fact one who is oblivious of a whole class of important facts) such a passage must be to him, if not absolute nonsense, no more than trivial

and illogical fancy. Cowslips are not tall compared with many other wild flowers, buttercups are certainly more golden, and spots are not rubies. To add to all this is the fact that every one of the words used in the passage, with the exception perhaps of 'savours', is of common, everyday currency.

From these accusations of inaccuracy, want of logic, and common-place wording, however, the passage emerges as lyric poetry of the highest order, because for many people it has the power of calling up the memory of past experiences, with their attendant moods and emotions. A large number of associated ideas may be brought to mind by a few skilfully-turned phrases, and this number, if due allowance be made for the nature of the ideas, may be taken as a measure of poetical value.<sup>1</sup>

At this point in the argument with our imaginary unimaginative critic it is safer to have recourse to the personal attitude. I cannot claim to be especially interested in cowslips, and I cannot remember at all clearly whether I had ever noticed the spots on them before reading *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*; moreover, I always find considerable difficulty in visualizing things from verbal descriptions. Yet in spite of all these disabilities that particular passage is extraordinarily pleasing to me.

If psycho-analysis can remove terror, as the psycho-therapists claim, it may, I suppose, also remove delight. But here a certain amount of auto-psycho-analysis is necessary, so that the risk must be taken, as far as part of the passage is concerned. I can remember the peculiar feeling of wonder and delight that I had as a child in looking at the speckled markings on the inside of the tube of a foxglove—the markings on certain birds' eggs had the same effect.<sup>2</sup> Now the lines in question do not bring back any clear memory of cowslips and their

<sup>1</sup> See *Principles of Literary Criticism*. I. A. Richards.

<sup>2</sup> There lay her shining eggs as bright as flowers

Ink-spotted over, shells of green and blue.

John Clare, *The Thrush's Nest*.

markings, but they do, by their reference to the markings on a flower, help me to recapture the mysterious pleasure which attended those early impressions.

Verse in which the words are not chosen and arranged so that they stimulate this rapid generalization of past events in what may be called their 'affective' aspect is not poetry, whereas prose which has this power is poetry which has discarded its usual garb of metre and rhyme.

If we now turn to our fairies for a moment and hear Ariel saying 'Come unto these yellow sands', we shall not want to argue with him that sand is not really yellow, because the invitation is too persuasive to allow one to bother about such things, and Ariel himself is far too volatile to wait while we do it.

But though the primary duty of poetry is to be stimulating rather than accurately descriptive, the fact remains that when it succeeds in being both its accuracy is an additional delight—that is to say, an added poetic pleasure, for there is a mood of satisfaction that accompanies accuracy and getting things right.

It is an interesting fact that the most imaginative of the great English poets, Shelley, is also the most accurate. When he writes:

As the dissolving warmth of dawn may fold  
A half unfrozen dew-globe, green and gold  
And crystalline, till it becomes a winged mist  
And wanders up the vault of the blue day,  
Outlives the noon, and on the sun's last ray  
Hangs o'er the sea, a fleece of fire and amethyst.

the passage certainly loses nothing by being an accurate biography of a drop of water from dawn to evening.

Once, during a walk in the early morning along a grass-fringed path where the drops of dew were turning the rays of the slant sun into the colours of the rainbow, I made a remark about these colours and found to my great surprise that my companion had never noticed them before. It is interesting to think of the note which might be written on Shelley's epithets 'green and



gold' by an admiring and fanciful but unobservant commentator, or the contemptuous comments that might be made by an equally unobservant matter-of-fact reader.

But we must return once again to the personal attitude. These personal details are not interesting in themselves. They are not meant to be. Their object is to show how, in some cases at least, artistic pleasure is aroused in the mind. I remember as a very small school-boy sitting one day in a position where the refracted light from a cut-glass salt-cellar shone directly into my eye. By moving the position of my eye slightly I could see varying colours of intense brilliancy, and looking at these colours gave the same mysterious effect of pleasure and wonder that I experienced while looking at the freckles of a foxglove. The reading of Shelley's epithets 'green and gold' has never, until I started to think about it just now, called up this incident to my mind, but it has always called up a memory of the attendant pleasure.

No one recommends the study of physiology as an antidote for the painful impression of a pin-prick, but people are apt to say that the study of botany, on its anatomical side, is liable to prevent one from taking delight in the beauty of flowers. As all this I steadfastly disbelieve, I shall continue the dissection of Shelley's delicate flower.

Its value as poetry—as poetry, not merely as a piece of writing—is enhanced by the fact that it is an accurate description of the processes of evaporation and condensation of water, together with certain attendant phenomena, which may have been studied experimentally in a laboratory.

Now those whose training has been almost entirely 'literary' are apt to receive such a statement with incredulity or derision. They labour under the delusion that test-tubes and retorts are the enemies of art, and suppose that since chemical and physical laboratories are commonly pleasing neither to the eye nor the ear—

to say nothing of the nose—therefore any associations of experiences in them which may be aroused by the words of a poet cannot possibly add to the aesthetic pleasure to be obtained from his poetry. This is, however, an attitude which can be taken up only by those who are unaware of the extent to which they are in the grip of their own associations, and these, among conventionally educated people, do not always extend over a very wide field. The general answer to such is this—that a feeling of rightness, acceptability, or congruity, is always a satisfactory one.

In fact this is the test whereby we may determine whether some work is a work of art or merely the creation of a diseased fancy. Mere sensuous ugliness, as every one knows, does not debar any work from being considered a fine piece of art; but unreasonable ugliness, namely incongruity, does.<sup>1</sup>

When the general principles of any natural processes, such as the evaporation and condensation of water, have been learnt, the feelings of rightness and acceptability which come into the mind under the influence of the poetic stimulus by no means necessarily—or even probably—bring back a memory of the exact physical means by which the knowledge was gained; any more than agreement with the statement ‘six sevens are forty-two’ necessarily brings back into memory the speckled cover of the book of tables from which this piece of arithmetical information was originally learnt.

The economy and generalization of memory which makes this immediate approbation possible in the intellectual world undoubtedly has its counterpart in the aesthetic field, and the intense pleasure given by some works of art is due to a rapid survey of the mind as it travels swiftly over past experiences, evoking from each its corresponding feeling.

There are undoubtedly certain conditions under which the mind is especially susceptible to the stimuli which art provides for the imagination. Music is largely

<sup>1</sup> See Lamb's *Essays of Elia*: ‘The Sanity of true Genius’.

concerned with producing such conditions, and so is the rhythm and metre and rhyme of poetry.

Without trying to trace the exact source of such pleasure, it may be noted that the alliteration of the g's and the contrast of the vowels in a phrase such as 'green and gold' are satisfactory in themselves apart from the meaning of the words. For this reason poetry of which the meaning is obscure is sometimes fascinating to read, it gives a kind of musical pleasure—and it is with no intention of merely making a cynical comment on singing technique that one says that the poetry of songs heard for the first time usually comes under this description.

We may now go back and, with the aid of a psychologist,<sup>1</sup> classify our matter-of-fact friend.

It has been found by experiment that the memory-ideas which represent the original experiences are, for some subjects, accompanied by the affection which coloured that experience, while for others they are entirely cold and colourless, no matter how intensive the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the experience may have been. Hence it is suggested that psychology must recognize, not only the various types of sense-memory (visual, auditory, etc.) but also an affective memory-type.

The memory complexes of these 'others' spoken of must consist of nothing but a kind of intellectual skeleton; and it seems as if such people must be largely insensitive to artistic pleasure on the one hand and to moral education on the other. Thus, if we take music as symbolical of art in general, Lorenzo's well-known but usually misquoted remark about the man that hath no music<sup>2</sup> in himself is probably a fairly useful warning—

<sup>1</sup> *An Outline of Psychology*. E. B. Titchener. Macmillan, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> Portia's gifts seem to have been forensic rather than musical or ornithological, for she says:

The nightingale, if she should sing by day  
When every goose is cackling, would be thought  
No better a musician than the wren.

The nightingale often does sing by day and is always easily distinguishable in a medley of bird-song by *his* superior quality and technique.

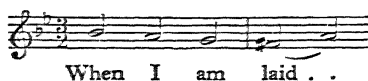
'let no such man be trusted'. At the same time it must be admitted that history, so far as she herself can be trusted, makes us acquainted with men who were full of music without having trustworthiness as their most marked characteristic.

But whether we agree with Lorenzo's remark or not, it is probably safe to assume that the memories of most of us belong to that class where the recalling of an event brings with it also, faintly or strongly, the feelings of pleasure, pain, pride, or shame with which the event was originally associated; though the memory of an event sometimes appears with the 'affection' modified or even inverted, as when we laugh at the memory of our own childhood's sorrows. Art undoubtedly has the power of short-circuiting this series and going directly to the production of a remembered 'affection' without establishing the memory of any particular event. We may therefore add, for the sung or spoken word, a third 'meaning' in addition to the two discussed in Chapter V—one that may be called a poetic or artistic meaning. And the extent of this meaning for any particular word will certainly vary greatly for different minds.

Here we may consider the connexion between poetry and music in song. A general emotional attitude is called a mood. Music has more connexion with moods than with intellectual or specific emotional meanings, though it is probable that a good many modern song composers either have not grasped, or do not agree with this.

Music unaided can do very little in suggesting the subtleties of sentiment. The connexion between mood and music may easily be tested practically. It is only necessary to sing the words 'Come unto these yellow sands' to the music of Purcell's 'Dido's Lament' or, vice versa, the words 'When I am laid in earth' to the music that he has written for Ariel's invitation: the incongruity is obvious.

But it is not easy to find a similar incongruity between a specific sentiment (or a statement) and a melody. The melody of the lament may be made to descend instead of to ascend without any damage being done to the meaning.



We may go further and change both time-signature and melody: the first words of Handel's song 'Where'er you walk' will go extremely well to a melody such as Brahms's 'Wie Melodien zieht es'.



Rate and temporal pattern (i.e. what is often called—and I think wrongly called—rhythm<sup>1</sup>) can, however, very seldom be tampered with in this way.

In general the aid which music gives to the words in a song is to render the mind more susceptible to certain poetic stimuli. And further, too, the form and melodic line may help to give point to the emphasis in dramatic, or even lyric, passages. The words repay this aid, for their changing vowels give variety to the quality of the musical tones: they also relieve monotony by suggesting variations in the musical phrasing in strophic songs.<sup>2</sup>

If there were any direct connexion between melody and meaning, songs of the strophic form would be condemned at the outset, since the same melody is used for the words of different verses. But there is actually much to be said for the strophic form, especially in simple songs for simple (not in a derogatory sense) listeners. The reiteration of the melody is an advantage, for, as some one has well pointed out, 'I know what I like' is often nearly the equivalent of 'I like what I know'. As the song goes on, the comfortable feeling

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter V.

of recognition becomes a more interesting one by reason of the slight disguises under which the known thing is presented.

Another device is to vary the harmonic treatment while the melody remains strictly strophic in form; this not only renders the song more interesting as a piece of music but is also able, in the hands of a skilful composer, to intensify the suggestion of the changes of mood and meaning in the words.

For these reasons even those who literally do not listen to the words of a song still owe these words some gratitude—for purely musical considerations.

There still has to be considered the fact that a large number of people who are not interested in poetry, and never read it, listen with undoubted pleasure to lyric singing. It is possible that a small proportion of these are rendered susceptible to the poetic stimulus by the greater intensity which is the result of the capable singing of words. The rest get their pleasure from the music and from the sensuous thrill which is inseparable from the sound of a beautiful—or even only powerful—human voice. For these, should any of them complain, when one becomes enthusiastic over the varied virtues of a great song, that they cannot see all that in it, one may borrow Turner's retort—on a somewhat similar occasion when pictures were in question—'Don't you wish you could?'

### CHAPTER III

## THE POSTULATES OF ART

Encore une fois, que ce soit un bien ou un mal, le comédien ne dit rien, ne fait rien dans la société précisément comme sur la scène; c'est un autre monde. DIDEROT, *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*.

WHEN Coleridge, in the course of his critical remarks upon *The Comedy of Errors*, says 'in a word, farces commence in a postulate, which must be granted', he has restricted to a particular kind of play a principle that is just as true of all plays—and indeed of all art. For all plays 'commence in a postulate', and every play-goer unconsciously makes allowance for the fact that he is concerned not with real life or its mirrored image, but with acting. Of all the units into which the complex skill of a good actor can be analysed, the one most indispensable consists precisely in making such modifications in ordinary behaviour as will suit the stage setting. For these modifications, however minute and subtle, must always be there, though they vary largely in degree according to the nature of the play. Verisimilitude or mere attempts at imitation are just as crude in acting as they are in any other form of art, and fail for two reasons: they cramp that imaginative activity which it is the prime duty of art to stimulate, and they are out of keeping with the rest of the picture in the frame. The effect is an incongruity of the kind that would be produced by a painter, who, growing tired of the flatness of his canvas, painted one of his figures on a plaster model in relief.

Every art is carried on in a frame or setting to which all its language and conventional signs must have a certain relation. In the arts of painting and acting there is, in fact, usually an actual frame which helps the mind of the beholder to take up a suitable attitude. The shape of the printed verse on paper is a preliminary hint that we are to consider not prose but poetry; its rhythm and

rhyme when recited continually remind us that we are not listening to the language of ordinary discourse.

If a criminal fleeing from justice decides to disguise himself as a curate, he must be careful that all his words and actions correspond with those of a real curate surrounded by ordinary people carrying on their ordinary business. But the atmosphere that the stage curate breathes and the frame in which he lives are different from those of real life, and his curatical behaviour must be modified in accordance with them. The actor's power of mimicry must be supplemented by stage technique. And the effective application of technique in acting and in other arts depends much less upon dramatic and emotional experience of one's own than it does upon the power and opportunity of observing the effect of such experiences on others; this may conveniently be described as 'artistic experience'.<sup>1</sup>

It is hardly necessary to point out the close similarity that exists in many respects between the art of singing and that of acting. Singing, however, in its simplest (not operatic) form, makes no appeal to the imagination through the eye directly, and though the general ticket-buying public may take the preliminary wriggles and smirks of the prima donna on the concert platform as an indication that there is a treat in store for them, the genuine music-lover will wait for the verdict of the ear.

But to return to Coleridge—any one may see that, in a farce, some of the words and gestures of the actor are concerned with suggesting to the audience the thoughts which are supposed to be going on in the mind of the 'character' that is being presented. In a melodrama, the villain would have very little chance of getting to the end of his part with any satisfaction to the more logically minded of the audience if the other 'characters' in the play were supposed to know the blackness of his character which he suggests to the audience in certain conventional ways. His behaviour is tacitly assumed to be interpreted in a different way by the audience on the one

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI.



hand and the actors on the other. This illusion sometimes becomes so strong that the less sophisticated of the audience have been known to call out a warning to the heroine.

All monologues bring out very clearly the convention that a character on the stage may talk audibly to himself without its being supposed that he is behaving in an unnatural or eccentric way; and in love-scenes the audience constitute a large collection of eavesdroppers without feeling embarrassed or ashamed of themselves. In modern plays, however, the actor brings about the effect of the old-fashioned 'aside' by a number of subtle appeals to the eye and the ear which give the required direction to the imagination of the audience.

It is here that one of the secrets of great acting lies; for often the most minute differences of gesture, delivery, and emphasis, together with their correct combination, proportion, and exact timing, produce immense differences in effect.

The methods by which a great artist produces his effects seem at first sight to be almost identical with those which in other hands are entirely ineffective. Here is a fact that needs explanation. Those who find patient analysis onerous or distasteful are apt at this point to have recourse to the magic word 'personality': one artist has it, another has not. On the other hand, those who are really anxious to understand the matter are not likely to be satisfied by being told that it is personality that causes these effects, for this is no explanation, but merely a notice that trespassers are not wanted in the confines of such mysteries.

It is, at any rate, no secret that people are very prone to confuse themselves between what are distinguished in medical language as predisposing and exciting causes.

At shooting-booths in fairs the hitting of the bull's-eye sometimes sets in motion clockwork machinery whereby a piece of irrelevant buffoonery is presented to the gaze of the delighted marksman. The simple-minded military recruit who supposes that a similar reward will

be his when practising at the miniature range is destined to disappointment, for, though the exciting causes are similar, the predisposing ones are different. The idea that the bigger the bullet the funnier the result, though strictly logical in one way (like the reasoning of the drunken man who looked for his lost watch in another street where the light was better), does not reach the level of sanity in another. Yet many of the unnecessary puzzles which people set themselves about art and other matters are based upon similar misconceptions of cause and effect.

So small an exciting cause as the throwing of a stone may cause an avalanche, but it can only do so if many tons of snow have previously collected upon a slope of a certain steepness.

The skilful artist uses his suggestions so that they cause a large effect upon the machinery and previously-stored 'contents' of the mind. But it is plain that the experiences appealed to, or rather their 'memory ideas', must be present in the mind to which the suggestions are made. The suggestions, too, must be of a certain kind—depending upon the particular art—and must impinge on the right 'place' or the required result is not obtained.

To put the matter shortly, the artist must know where to aim and also must be a good shot. The knowledge is a matter of *artistic* experience—as defined above—the good shooting is a matter of technique.

Certain things in connexion with suggestion can best be considered by turning for a moment to the arts of sculpture and painting. We will suppose that Michelangelo produces a piece of sculpture and calls it 'David'; and we will suppose further that it is looked at by some one who knows neither the title nor the life-story of David. The associations that such a work of art will arouse in him must be fewer, perhaps much fewer, than those in some equally sensitive person who knows both the title and the story. Now let us suppose that they are both looking at it without seeing the title and that after-

wards the title is shown; a whole set of new associations will be aroused in the one who knows the story, whereas the other is no better off than he was before. Thus, unless the characteristics of the statue are so marked that the idea of 'David' inevitably arises in the mind of a beholder familiar with Old Testament history, it is plain that the new ideas that arise are due to the writing or mention of the *word* 'David'. So that—to borrow a term from another art—sculpture which has to be given a title in order to produce its full effect of associated ideas may be called 'programme-sculpture', and it is not strictly a pure or simple art. Thus a work of art that requires explanation is either in some sense incomplete or has been addressed to the wrong people.

There are many works of art, universally regarded as great, that obviously belong to this class, but they can bear with equanimity the accusation of not being simple or pure, because the artist is by no means bound to confine himself to limits which are useful to those interested in classification. On the other hand, classification itself may be defended because of its undoubted use in clearing up our ideas about the nature of art in general.

Incidentally, it should be mentioned that all names do not have this additional effect, for they may merely be convenient ways of referring to a particular work. For instance, no new ideas would be gained by seeing 'Boy with Spinning-Top' written under Chardin's picture on the subject. But if it were labelled as an early portrait of a man who afterwards became famous for the invention of some form of gyroscope, it is plain that the picture would still have all its original artistic merit together with the biographical interest suggested by the title. Such additional interests, though connected with the picture, are not strictly part of the art of painting.

It need not be supposed that an object of art that requires a title for its full appreciation is necessarily inferior to one that does not. A statue or picture may

possess all the virtues of a beautiful work of art and, without any aid from its title, may more than hold its own when compared with works of 'pure' art. A portrait is always a picture with a title, and the painter who does portraits of his contemporaries is always in the difficult position of having to satisfy two classes of critics; for his picture will not satisfy the relatives and friends of the subject unless it is very like him, whereas the general public will care very little whether the picture represents exactly the features of a man they do not know unless at the same time it has the power of arousing their interest and stimulating their imagination.

In the song, this form of 'programme-art' is employed in a reciprocal manner. If the song is really good, the music should be capable of giving a great deal of pleasure when entirely divorced from the words. At this point it is exactly in the position of the 'character'-statue before the title is shown. The words have an effect similar to that of a title, for they evoke a whole set of further associated ideas. But the words of a song have a great advantage over the title of a picture in that they have, or should have, an aesthetic value of their own; which value is again enhanced by the aid which the music gives, for one may look upon the music as being in some sense an explanation of the words, or at all events a medium whereby their emotional message is more readily appreciated.

A good illustration of these principles is Schubert's song 'Die Junge Nonne'. If the words are cut out and the song is played on an instrument with the piano accompaniment, it still remains a beautiful and interesting piece of music on account of its melody, harmony, rhythm, and general form. It would then be very much in the same condition as the portrait-statue without a name. But as soon as the title of the song and the words of the poem are known, the particular music that the composer has written takes on a large number of new meanings. The rain beating on the windows, the growling of the thunder, and the convent bell are all

suggested to the imagination as a background to the main subject of the song, namely, the thoughts of the young nun. The resources of a modern orchestra or cinema-organ could no doubt make a much better imitation of a thunderstorm, but the principal business of art is suggestion, not imitation. Those to whom mere imitation gives pleasure would do well to wait for the next thunderstorm.

Of all the arts, those of singing and opera are perhaps the most postulate-dependent. Full enjoyment cannot be got from an opera unless one is an adept at the child's game of make-believe, though enjoyment may be got from the musical part independently or (not so easily as a rule) from the acting and stage setting.

The particular postulates which are necessary for the complete appreciation of these arts have been the subject of considerable misunderstanding on the part of the theorist and the teacher, though the ordinary listener or playgoer usually supplies them automatically without any difficulty. The presence of real people on the stage disguises from many critics the fact that the actors are primarily symbols suggesting thoughts to the imagination of the audience—not some people imitating others.

Of all critics of the drama, Charles Lamb is perhaps the one who has kept this most clearly in mind, and it is a pity that the popular idea<sup>1</sup> of Lamb as the fanciful and charming essayist—to say nothing of his courageous and lovable personality—has tended to obscure his gifts as a subtle and clear-minded critic of art in general and of the drama in particular.

The general postulate in all art is just the negative one that art does not hold up a mirror to nature. A good mirror reflects things in their entirety and in their exact proportions, but with the colours slightly dimmer: art selects and modifies, and, as often as not, intensifies the

<sup>1</sup> His best-known essays, too, are always called *Essays of 'Eliia'*, though Lamb himself expressly said the name was pronounced '*Ellia*'—see his letter to John Taylor, July 30th, 1821.

colours. Suggestion is its aim, and economy in the means of doing this one of its chief virtues.

When the fundamental postulate is forgotten, all criticism of art becomes irrelevant; and we shall see later into what absurdities this forgetfulness led even so clear-headed a thinker as Tolstoy.

## CHAPTER IV

### IMITATION AND SUGGESTION

WE shall probably avoid some of the confusions that are often to be found in discussions about art if we attack the question of song-interpretation by considering first what happens to the listener. A picture which is hung in some gallery may be seen whenever we please with a fair amount of confidence that it will be, for all practical purposes, the same on each occasion. This kind of thing is not true of a song, and the reason for it may be found by considering what it is reasonable to suppose is meant by the word 'song'. It is used in a way which implies that a song is something with a kind of independent existence, like a picture. But the 'song' which we buy is no more than a set of printed instructions from the composer how to produce a certain series of sounds: it does not have a real existence as a set of stimuli to the listener until some one actually starts singing. Of the various interpretations that the listener may hear, which is really the song? The poor thing seems to be reduced to a kind of hypostatical condition similar to that of the imaginary ideal player in the golf world, so that if some one sang badly he might be said to be 'four down to Bogey'.

The only person who is in a position to settle the matter definitely is the composer himself. The composing really exists in the orderly arrangement of his thoughts, and not in the writing down of the conventional signs for such thoughts on paper, though this latter process may be of assistance to him.

So far as the listener is concerned, when he goes to a concert to hear some new work, the song is what he hears from the singer. The singer's business is to produce the vocal equivalent of the ideas of the composer as nearly as possible. His power to do so depends primarily upon his ability to interpret to himself all the

signs which the composer has written, and afterwards upon his ability to turn these into the auditory stimuli which will cause the imagination of the listener to work in certain specific directions. The painter can paint his own picture, the composer usually has to get some one else to do this for him. If he is not a singer himself he can do no more than give his interpreter a set of instructions; if he is composing a symphony or opera he can never do more than that.

But even now we have not gone quite far enough, for the song finally has its being in the brain of the listener. Anatole France sums up the matter in words that I have quoted elsewhere: *'En vain la main de l'artiste sera inspirée et savante, le son qu'elle rendra dépend de la qualité de nos cordes intimes.'* So that a singer with a voice of a particular quality may, by the singing of a few words, arouse in a sensitive listener feelings and associations of which the singer himself is quite ignorant. Vivid visual memories may be aroused in the minds of certain listeners by the singing of such a song as 'Morgen' of Strauss; and if the singer is himself weak in the visualizing faculty they may be memories and imaginings which not only do not occupy him as he sings but also are almost impossible for him at any time.

Thus, in singing, as in other arts, it is by no means only a matter of direct communication of thought from the 'expresser' to the 'impressed'; so that the answer to the question whether the singer can arouse in an audience thoughts which he has not experienced himself, and suggest to them memories of experiences which he has not been through himself (in the ordinary acceptance of the phrase), is, to adopt the simple language of our legislators, in the affirmative.

The question of communication of thought may also be considered by trying to imagine what is going on in the minds of half a dozen people listening to the same singer. The exact thoughts of each are determined by his own previous experiences: the exciting cause, the singing, is the same for each, but the predisposing



causes vary for each individual, and hence the results, though they may have a family resemblance, will all be different.

It is not necessary to have had a very wide experience of amateur and professional singing to know that our thoughts while we listen to some singers are certainly not those which are occupying the singers at the time, nor are they necessarily, or even probably, thoughts that they have had exactly at any time. Every one knows, too, that a well-practised song must be done automatically, to a large extent. It would not be necessary to stress such obvious facts if we did not hear so much about the 'expression' of the artist and so little about the 'impression' of those to whom he addresses himself.

In the song called 'Shepherd, see thy horse's foaming mane', one of the Hungarian melodies arranged by Korbay, one may sing 'with this bludgeon do I strike him dead', and sing it effectively, without ever having been within measurable distance of killing some hated rival with a heavy stick. Most schoolboys have been irritated at one time or another into trying to punch some one's head. Jealousy is not an uncommon feeling among the young, so that every young singer has the required experience ready to hand. It is the *words* in a song of this kind which supply the suggestion of the greater intensity of emotion.

We need claim no more experience for that interesting person, the artist, than that which enters into the ordinary conventional life of every normal human being. The artist's distinguishing peculiarity, perhaps, is that he is more sensitive to certain kinds of experience, but you do not need to be continually pricking yourself with a pin to remind yourself that it hurts.

It is unlikely, however, that there should not be some foundation for the conventional way of regarding this question of self-expression on the part of the artist. The truth is that real experience is useless to him without what may be called artistic experience. He may get

on with only a small amount of the former provided he is continually undergoing the latter, which is dependent upon what may be called re-impression, either deliberate or instinctive.

The artist who paints a picture steps back from it to look at it and see what kind of effect it has on his own imagination. In doing this he is hampered by knowing what effect he meant the picture to produce, so it is easy to see why artists are sometimes bad critics of their own work, and why they attach an exaggerated importance to some example of it that other people may not regard as interesting.

These considerations also enable us to look with the indulgence born of comprehension upon the extraordinary antics of the followers of some freak school of art. A man may be so constituted by nature and environment that a peculiarly shaped smudge on a canvas may always call up the idea of an elephant, whereas another curious set of curves may be the sign of a soul in anguish. A medley of colour-smudges, with green as the predominant shade and the above two symbols in the foreground, might always bring back to him the memory of his feelings when he was lost in the jungle as a child. As the artist looks at such a picture, which he labels 'Fear of the Jungle', he sees signs that he recognizes, and hence may be satisfied that he has 'expressed himself' adequately. And so he has—but to whom? To himself and a small coterie who happen to have the key to these associations. And even though these associations may only be those of having had indigestion during a visit to the Zoo, we cannot deny the term 'work of art' to something merely because it appears to us frivolous or disagreeable. We reserve the term 'great artist', however, for one who uses a language of more universal intelligibility.

The artist, whether he be poet, painter, actor, or singer, has to be continually making experiments on himself so that he may be able to judge the effect of his conventional signs upon the imagination of those

other people to whom his art is addressed. The artist who does his work 'for Art's sake' is really doing it for his own sake; that is to say, he is addressing himself. It is obvious that nothing will save his work from oblivion if there is not at some time found a body of people whose responses to his work are similar to his own. Every sincere artist works very largely in this way—to please himself, in the first place. If he makes his living by his art he has to consider his public, and this may have a bad effect on his sincerity. But this necessity is by no means the unmixed evil that some esoterics would have us believe. An effort to make himself clear to the uninitiated is often a very salutary discipline for any artist.

If this twofold nature of the artist's business were kept more definitely in view, it would do much to clear up a good deal of vagueness and obscurity in the teaching and discussion of art in general and of singing in particular. I have quoted elsewhere a remark made by a distinguished singer about the interpretation of a song by Brahms, but it is so useful for our present purpose that no excuses need be made for quoting it again. We are told that during the singing of 'Feldeinsamkeit', 'Dissolution of the soul in the universe must sound forth in the singer's tone'.

It was one of Phil May's characters, I believe, who suggested that in order to catch a rabbit one should hide behind a hedge and make a noise like a turnip. It is on a somewhat similar principle, I suppose, that in order to charm an audience with the beauty of 'Feldeinsamkeit' one should appear on a platform and make a noise like a soul dissolving in the universe. The inquiring singer may reasonably ask what is the 'tone' that will contain this high-sounding but vague emotion. He might—using for the purpose a 'tone' in which bewilderment or even indignation 'sounded forth'—ask 'What on earth (or in the universe) do you mean by that?' Putting aside for the moment the *lèse-majesté* of such a

question to a successful singer, let us try to answer it more or less in the terms of 'busy common sense'.

The song tells of some one lying in long grass; he can hear the sounds of a summer day, but can see nothing except the clouds passing across the sky, and he has a feeling of remoteness that makes him imagine he has been dead a long time and is travelling through boundless space. I make no excuse for the baldness of this paraphrase, for it is precisely the business of the poet, the composer, and the singer to put the matter in a way that is acceptable to the artistic susceptibilities of the people who are listening to the song. The instruction to the singer then becomes something of this kind: 'You must attempt to arouse in the minds of your listeners memories of the feelings, emotions, or moods they have experienced when lying at rest on a calm summer day looking at the clouds passing across the sky.' In this form the piece of instruction does not sound nearly as grand as before, but it has the modest merit of being clearly intelligible as far as it goes. So clear, in fact, that the next inevitable question is not 'What does that mean?' but 'How am I to do that?' In general, the answer to this question is 'by using in certain ways all the technique which you have at your command'.

And the answer to the next inevitable question, 'Which ways?' involves the whole business of the teaching of interpretation, which consists essentially in showing why the use of the voice in certain ways will produce certain effects in the minds of the listeners. Art has not, as is so constantly asserted or implied, a special mystery of its own. Its mystery is of the same kind as that of all associations in consciousness, and, though in ultimate analysis all things are inexplicable, it is yet possible to go a considerable distance in practice towards explaining why a certain effect is produced by a certain sound, or collection of sounds, presented in a particular way.

It is a pleasing exercise for the eloquent teacher to make up phrases descriptive of the emotions which the

'tone' is intended to convey. But if by 'tone' is meant quality of vocal sound, the amount of specific suggestion which it can make *unaided* by words, emphasis, and melody is very small. Moreover, instructions of this kind shirk the real difficulty—namely, that of demonstrating the relation between vocal cause and suggestive effect on the imagination.

In his book, *Du Chant*, Reynaldo Hahn tells the story of an opera-singer who, during the rehearsal of the Toreador's song from *Carmen*, sang the words 'Et songe en combattant qu'un œil noir te regarde' with a very fierce expression on his face. When asked by the conductor why he did this, he replied, 'Mais, c'est pour imiter le regard du taureau.' The most remarkable part of this confusion, as Hahn goes on to point out, lies, not in supposing that the dark eye belonged to the bull instead of the beautiful lady who was watching, but in the absurd idea that the singer must project himself into, or imitate in some way, anything about which he is singing. This is a kind of artistic disease that might be called 'onomatopoeia', and, carried into ordinary life, would make the sufferer suppose that his warning to a friend, 'mind the step', could not be efficacious unless he demonstrated the danger by stumbling over the step himself.

The same kind of mistake is made in a more subtle form when it is laid down as an unalterable law that men must not sing women's songs, nor women men's. Whether this is incongruous or not depends on several things, but on the majority of occasions all incongruity is removed if the singing is good enough. Must 'Der Tod und das Mädchen' be sung as a duet? If it is replied that, in spite of the 'der', Death is sexless, who is going to provide the voice suitable to the occasion? The girl herself calls him 'Knochenmann'.<sup>1</sup> But there is no escape from the difficulty in Massenet's 'Ouvre tes yeux bleus'; for the second verse is the girl's reply to the man's invitation in the first. This might quite easily be

<sup>1</sup> Even a skeleton is allowed a sex. See Tennyson's 'Vision of Sin'.

sung as a duet, and yet no one seems to think it necessary. Finally we come to such songs as the folk-song 'William Taylor', where there is narrative to start with, then a man speaks, and afterwards a girl. This, on the onomatopoeic principle, seems to want three genders—or perhaps only two singers and a chorus.

Yet there are reasons why it is a good practical rule for members of each sex to restrict themselves to what are apparently their own songs; one, at least, is connected more with the conditions under which singing usually has to be done than with the art itself. A singer is usually visible to the audience, so that one may hear remarks suitable for a woman, but see a man. In any case, one hears remarks more proper for one sex given out by the kind of voice naturally associated with the other. This, it would seem, must inevitably cause a feeling of incongruity. But in certain songs, as has already been suggested, all incongruity is removed if the singing is good enough, for a man's voice may be lightened to suggest that of a woman; the reverse may also be done, but not so easily, for the simple reason that it is easier to cut out lower partial tones than to put them in. Moreover, the use of a heavy so-called 'chest-voice' in women is liable to be attended with certain disadvantages to the vocal instrument as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the bass with an unalterably dramatic tone will do well to avoid words such as 'I love the merry, merry sunshine', or those expressing a longing to be a butterfly, while the light soprano may reasonably exclude from her repertoire a song that begins with the statement 'My wealth's a burly spear and brand'.

For the purpose of indicating where certain misunderstandings lie with regard to 'interpretation' in the art of singing—and doubtless it is not only in the art of singing that such things occur—we will take as an illustration the song 'Robin Adair'. A purely imaginary but by no means unparalleled lesson might start by an explanation such as the following: 'In this poem a

<sup>1</sup> *L'Art de chanter une chanson.* Yvette Guilbert.

young girl laments the absence of the man on whom she has set her affections. She explains that all the occupations that are usually regarded as pleasant have lost their attraction since he has gone, and finally she confesses the constancy of her affection in spite of the cooling of his.'

It is apparently sometimes supposed that this changing of the neat words of a poem into a banal prose version is of real assistance to the singer, whose failure to sing the song properly is judged to be due to an inability to understand the words. Reynaldo Hahn's singer might, perhaps, fail to grasp the main outlines of the story in the poem 'Robin Adair' at a first reading, but we may pay singers as a class the small compliment of supposing that he is an exception. A failure to sing a song properly is often due to lack of appreciation of a poem, but this is not a want of a kind that can be satisfied by the supplying of a prose version. If some one does not respond to a poetic stimulus he cannot be induced to respond to it by having it taken away. And the supplying of a prose version is no more than equivalent on the positive side to telling a child, who has made a very bad drawing of a cow, that its picture is not meant to represent a horse but a cow. The child knows that already; what he wants to know further is the kind of marks on paper that will arouse the idea of a cow in others, or even in himself.

Another thing that the pupil may be told is to try to put herself in the position of the girl who has been deserted by her lover. But do people who have been deserted sing songs about it in public to others? I think not. Goldsmith makes Olivia do it in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, but this indecorous incident is one of the blemishes on that charming work. The singer spoken of above, if he took up the teaching of art, would perhaps tell the child-artist to put himself in the place of the cow and try to imagine what it felt like to have horns, or, relinquishing imagination as an uncertain guide, would suggest drinking a glass of milk before starting to draw,

so that the spirit of the cow should pervade the being of the artist and flow out through his pencil. The mysteries of art do not lie in these direct sympathies; it is not necessary to have been a cow in order to draw one.

All arts have their conventional signs, the meaning of which must be known before the art can be understood. This is very obvious in singing, though less so in acting, where there are people moving and speaking in a comparatively natural way; or in arts such as painting and sculpture, where there is apparently an attempt to imitate natural objects. Any work within the limits of any of these arts may fail because the amount of mere imitation is either overdone or not done enough, for, as was pointed out in Chapter III, both these faults cramp that imaginative activity which it is the prime duty of art to stimulate.

In the particular example which we have chosen, the problem the singer has to solve is to find the vocal signs which are necessary to make the audience imagine feelings similar to those of Robin Adair's deserted lady. When the words and music of a song are good, the singer's chief concern is to see that both receive adequate attention. This seems too obvious to need stating, but it has to be realized that to do so involves a high degree of musical and literary taste backed up by a first-class technique. Most of us have come across the kind of sentimental morass created by an attempt to make up for inadequate thought or technique by so-called 'expression'.

Some modern composers seek to make their song foolproof by crowding the vocal line and accompaniment with instructions. Schubert, at any rate, was convinced that such things were unnecessary. If we divide singers into two classes, those who have studied the words intelligently and those who have not, it is plain that the vast majority of such instructions are useless to the first class and meaningless to the second.

But we seem to be very little nearer to any definite



indications of the right way to sing the song.<sup>1</sup> What exactly has to be done to suggest scorn here, indifference there, and melancholy throughout, to arouse in those of the audience fitted to feel such things the memories and emotions that come back to those who have suffered the desolation of being deprived of a beloved companion?

It has already been suggested that direct and identical experience in itself is of very little value, so that it is luckily unnecessary that any one should subject herself to the pain of being deserted before attempting this song. It is not necessary to be in love at the time, or even to have been in love before; art is neither identity<sup>2</sup> nor imitation.<sup>3</sup> Those who still cling to the idea of the necessity of exact experience must face the awkward conclusion that on the same principle you cannot represent a dying man on the stage unless you have died at some time. A monster incapable of any affection might not make a great success of a love-song, but even he might do it by listening to other singers and watching other people in love. The listener, merely by listening, has very little chance of finding out how you learn your songs; and the sincere listener does not care—he leaves the biographer, the illustrated paper, and the tea-party to worry about such things.

By precept, very little can be done beyond the enunciation of certain general principles when discussing the correct way to sing a particular song, for the subtle

<sup>1</sup> The melody is of Irish origin, I believe, or at all events has an Irish version—see the note on the melody 'Aileen Aroon' in Stanford's edition of *Moore's Irish Melodies* (Boosey). The little jerks in the popular version, so effective in some melodies, put decided difficulties in the way of a singer who is aiming at a dignified rendering. I much prefer the simpler form of the melody with an ascending scale—passage for the refrain. I once heard a prima donna put in a minor sixth in the last verse for the first syllable of 'Adair'; but she was neither Irish nor Scottish, and for all I know may have come from a land where the minor sixth is the conventional sign of grief.

<sup>2</sup> 'It is by giving up these identities that art gains true strength.' R. L. Stevenson.

<sup>3</sup> 'By a wise falsification the great masters of painting got at their true conclusion.' Charles Lamb.

combination of minute effects, whose aggregate influence upon the imagination is so immense, can be illustrated very rapidly in practice, but only very tediously in print. It is possible, however, to discuss one or two points in this song which will illustrate certain principles of interpretation in general.

The music of the first phrase makes nine singers out of ten, at a modest estimate, say 'What's this dull *town* to me?'. Such an accentuation misleads the imagination of the listener, and makes him anticipate that the town is to be compared with some other place, whereas afterwards he discovers that under certain conditions this same town is 'heaven on earth'. If the words are presented in the form 'What's this *dull* town to me?', the listener is prepared for the 'heaven and earth' which comes later. This may seem trivial, but it is really nothing of the sort.

It is the business of the singer to present the song in such a way that the intellectual effort of the listener is reduced to a minimum, for you cannot stimulate the imagination of some one to whom you have just set a problem in parsing. Even this is putting the matter too mildly, for the song does not stop to give the listener time to solve the puzzles which are set him.

The song is a panorama which passes before the ears instead of the eyes, and the parts are much more interdependent than the panorama of the visual world. The omission or faulty placing of an emphasis may spoil not only an individual phrase but a whole song. The stresses on certain syllables in a sentence not only bring out its own meaning, but also often have a more far-reaching importance in that they prepare the mind for the rapid assimilation of a sentence which is to follow.

The settling of the often conflicting claims of the formal stresses of music and the more capricious stresses of the words, and the consequent presentation of vocal music so that both are suggested to the listener, is perhaps the most important problem that the singer has to solve. The few singers who do it successfully

often make a song sound much better than the composer has any right to expect.

Upon the efforts of these few depends the right of 'interpretation' to consider itself an independent creative art.

The correct singing of this song would bring out another general principle, namely, that it is not sufficient to sing a sad song sadly; that is to say, it is not enough to present the words of a sad song with exactly the same expression that would be used in the ordinary affairs of life by a sad person. Such a treatment usually, if not invariably, does no more than give the impression that the singer is bored with the song. For the moment it is not necessary to consider what particular associations in the mind of the listener bring about this effect; any experienced teacher knows that it is true.

A song on a sad subject has to be sung in such a way that it arouses the memory of certain sad thoughts in the mind of the listener. One of the essentials for this is not that the singer should feel sad himself, but that he should say the words in a way that suggests that he himself is interested in their meaning. This suggestion of interest is largely a matter of articulation and intelligent emphasis, and is done in very much the same way whether the song is a sad or a happy one.

A singer may be considerably affected by the sound of his own singing, but his feelings on such occasions are the effect and not the cause of his artistic rendering; his singing is reflected back, so to speak, and affects him objectively, as it does the rest of the audience.

While we are looking at or listening to any work of art, certain things must be thrust into the background of conscious attention, for it is only under such conditions that one is enabled to abandon oneself to the stimulation of the conventional signs. Although this inhibition of certain parts of the critical faculty goes on easily or automatically as a rule, yet the inability to effect it is without doubt one of the reasons why some people find some works of art so puzzling.

This is shown very plainly by the bitter but amusing criticism of the early part of 'Siegfried' in Tolstoy's *What is Art?* Tolstoy had some sound reasons to give for his dislike of opera as an art. Yet to say that some one came on to the stage as the character<sup>1</sup> Mime, but that one could see he was really an actor by his lack of muscle, is as absurdly irrelevant as to say that Michelangelo's 'David' is easily seen to be a piece of stone.

But Wagner certainly had need of his amazing musical genius to overcome his occasional lapses into childish naïveté in staging. It is one of the greatest compliments that can be paid to the compelling power of his music that one puts up comparatively contentedly with his dragons, swans, doves, and flames. No one really interested in the music of an opera worries, after the first shock, whether the weight of Isolde is nearer twelve stone than nine, provided that her singing is good enough; still, there is no sense in multiplying things that easily become a hindrance instead of an aid to the imagination. Tolstoy's remarks make it plain that the music was quite incapable of setting him free from the tyranny of the visual sense; and it must be admitted that some operas make such an escape very difficult.

That Wagner himself sometimes realized this is shown by an incident related in Romain Rolland's *Musiciens d'aujourd'hui*. A friend of Wagner's was using her opera-glasses to watch a scene from *The Ring* when some one came behind her and put his hands over her eyes, and she heard the voice of Wagner himself saying impatiently, 'Don't watch so much: listen'.

*Tristan and Isolde* will provide another simple illustration. I suppose that every one will agree that the singer taking the part of Tristan is not expected to sing the whole of the third Act as if he were actually dying.

<sup>1</sup> . . . with weak, white, genteel hands (his easy movements and especially the shape of his stomach and his lack of muscle revealed the actor) beat an impossible sword with an unnatural hammer in a way in which no one ever uses a hammer; and at the same time, opening his mouth in a strange way, he sang something incomprehensible. (Aylmer Maude's translation of Tolstoy's *What is Art?*)

Yet this is what the Tolstoyan method of criticism would require him to do. A dying man cannot compete with a full orchestra, and he would certainly be indifferent to the conductor's baton; in any case, how absurd to make a mortally wounded man sing loudly for the last three-quarters of an hour of his life!

Such criticism may be amusing, but it is not relevant. The singer who is taking the part of Tristan is not trying to imitate a dying man. The intensity of the singing—its loudness, volume, and emphasis—does not represent the state of Tristan's physical health: its object is to suggest to the audience the intensity of his feelings.

The curtain in the theatre does not hide a mirror in which we are to see a reflection of human beings occupied in their ordinary affairs; it hides a picture where the figures suggest things to our imagination. If we do not realize this we shall be wasting our time, as much as Tolstoy wasted his, in going to the opera, or in listening to singing.

## CHAPTER V

### MEANING IN SPEECH AND SONG

THE statement that five sevens are thirty-five is one that might be thought to be as far removed from the influence of human passion and prejudice as can well be imagined. It apparently gives no opportunity for argument, however aggressively it is presented. As printed in the multiplication table, it can be applied with pleasing impartiality to things as prosaic as the buttons on our garments or to those as poetic and unattainable as clusters of stars in the Galaxy. But only put it in the mouth of an impatient and irritated teacher talking to a nervous child, and it can at once be seen that the expression of an elementary fact in pure mathematics is capable of becoming highly charged with emotion—so much so that probably the only meaning clearly conveyed to the child is that of the anger of its teacher. This meaning is of very little assistance to the child in the correction of a long-division sum; and the teacher, not realizing the double meaning of his remark, which seems to him entirely free from ambiguity, wonders at the pupil's stupidity and becomes still more irritated.

It is sad to think of the amount of teaching that goes on under somewhat similar conditions; but luckily, for the moment, we have to think of something else, namely, the general principles of which this is a particular instance.

As soon as any one begins to speak or sing, he produces this dual effect upon his hearers. These effects, for purposes of rough classification, may be called intellectual and emotional.<sup>1</sup>

The proportions in which these two effects are mixed

<sup>1</sup> For an accurate and detailed discussion of 'Meaning' see Ogden and Richards's *Meaning of Meaning* (Kegan Paul).

There is a tendency for every one to inhibit his understanding of part of any angry person's meaning in order to concentrate entirely upon a defence against the anger.

vary enormously, not only with the 'tones of the voice' employed, but also with the actual words chosen to express a thought; and the two meanings may have a close connexion, or may be entirely independent, as they are in the example of the irritated teacher quoting from the multiplication table. On the other hand, the words of an angry man often have a close connexion with his anger; but it is not necessary to hear them in order to interpret one part of his 'meaning'—i.e. to realize that he is angry—in fact, one would often be glad not to know the exact symbols he is using.

The teacher who habitually distracts attention from his mathematical meaning by an excess of emotion does not know his job, whereas one more skilled may drive home his intellectual (or symbolic) meaning by a judicious use of the other. Singers seldom have to deal with anything as 'unemotional' as mathematical truths; they are more often occupied with something nearer to the opposite extreme. There are, indeed, a large number of people whose interest in singing is almost entirely musical; what they require from the singer is melody, musical phrasing, and rhythm, with just that extra aesthetic or emotional interest that comes from the sound of a beautiful human voice. Reasons will be given later, however, why it is necessary for the singer, even when singing to such listeners as these, to pay full attention to the words in their symbolical aspect.

But, for the moment, the chief point we are considering is the fact that it is almost impossible to make the simplest remark without conveying more than would be expressed by the same words in print. The printer has no type that will suggest that he was annoyed when he printed  $7 \times 5 = 35$ , nor can he keep an indication of sincere sentiment out of the printed words 'I love you, darling', whereas the same words can easily be spoken in the way that conveys an insult. For sarcasm depends upon an intentional contrast between the two meanings which we are discussing. The admitted difficulty of choosing exactly the right words to convey any thought

without the possibility of misunderstanding on the intellectual side is common to both print and speech; but in conversation, even supposing the right words are chosen, the quality of voice in which they are said, the loudness, the accentuation, and the carefulness or carelessness of the enunciation, will all tend to convey ideas about the speaker's state of mind which may or may not correspond to its actual state. And even this is not the end of the matter, for a simple piece of mathematical information, couched in extremely matter-of-fact terms, may betray the nationality or district of the speaker; and this may easily engage the attention of the listener to the exclusion of the fact that the speaker is trying to convey.

On the verbal side, the main duty of the singer is to give the impression that he is interested in the words of his song. This is by no means the same thing as requiring him to feel the sentiments or emotions he intends to portray. No one expects an artist to hold his brush in a listless manner and to feel depressed while he is painting a figure symbolical of grief, but he is not likely to paint an interesting picture on the subject unless he has at some time or another been sufficiently interested in sad people to make very accurate observations on their attitudes and expressions.

The creating of this impression of interest is in some ways a very simple matter, and the method applies equally to speech and to song. It is effected by clearness of diction (in the French sense of treatment, not choice of words) and decision of attack. The word diction is here meant to include not only mere articulation, but also that accentuation that makes some syllables in a phrase stand out more than others; and it is a curious fact that interest (of some sort) is conveyed even when accents are put on unimportant words. I have a friend who, when he has not seen you for some time, always says, 'How *do* you do?' This gives the impression that he is really pleased to see you, and the accentuation of the least important of the four words may, however, be



defended by saying that the phrase is much more of an exclamation of greeting than a question.

The singer or speaker, however, has other things to do in his presentation of words besides giving this impression of interest in general. He has to make clear, after showing that he is interested, exactly what it is that he is interested in suggesting. This involves a very careful consideration of the exact meaning of each word and phrase. He has to decide, if he is speaking, exactly where he is going to put his emphases, and how he is going to lead up to them; the speaker also has to decide upon his pitch variations, pauses, and alterations of speed.


For all these things are part of the technical means whereby the spoken word is made a much more subtle form of communication than the written word. Writing and print take no account of alterations in speed and pitch. A certain amount of emphasis may be achieved by italics, large print, or underlining, but these are usually rather irritating, for they often seem to carry the implication that the reader is not very intelligent. Punctuation gives some indication of pauses, but the reader who paused exactly the same time for each comma would soon lull his audience to sleep if he had a pleasant voice, or irritate them into fidgeting if he had not. To the eye, however, one comma is the same as another.


Of the three variable factors—pitch, pauses, and speed—not one seems to be left to the discretion of the singer who is singing a song composed by some one else, for the melody determines the pitch of each syllable, while the rests and tempo settle the other two. Even the accentuation in barred rhythmical music is arranged for him in advance to a great extent.


There still remains one variable factor which has not yet been considered—that of quality or timbre. Quality is, unfortunately, not nearly such a potent means of expression as is usually supposed. The misleading term 'tone of voice' stands for something which, so far from being a matter of quality alone, really is a complex

containing all the variable factors of speech. If this were not so, the unfortunate possessors of ugly voices could hardly ever say anything pleasant without running the risk of being suspected of sarcasm.

Luckily, however, the definite melodic and 'temporal' construction of a song does not restrict the singer's freedom of expression as much as might be supposed at first sight, for his business is not to copy, but to suggest, the sound of interesting speech, and the ear is extremely sensitive to minute alterations in sound where words and groups of words are concerned. A sudden absolute cessation of sound, far too small to interfere with the time or rhythm, will immediately suggest the equivalent of a comma in print. A slight 'thinning' of the quality of sound, with a simultaneous decrease in loudness and a smoothing of accentuation, will give the same parenthetical effect that is got in reading by dropping the voice and quickening the speed. By such means a relative or qualifying clause can be sung so that the two parts of a main sentence that it divides can be fitted together without trouble by those who are listening—for another of the obvious duties of the singer or speaker is to present his words so that all construing puzzles are already solved; for example:

1.  
  
 Trees, where you sit, shall crowd in - to . . . a shade

2.  
  
 Dass mein Herz, gleich die - ser Au, mög' in Won - ne blü - hen

3.  
  
 Since thou, O fond-est and tru - est, Hast lov'd me best and long - est

<sup>1</sup> Handel's 'Where'er you walk': words from Pope's 2nd Pastoral—not from Congreve, as stated in so many editions of the song.

<sup>2</sup> Brahms: 'Minnelied'.

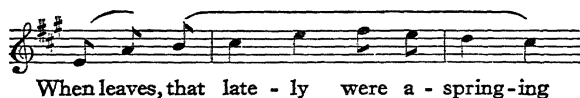
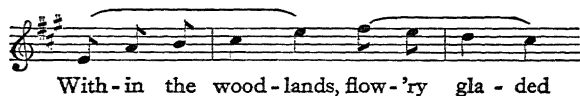
<sup>3</sup> Samuel Liddle: words by Robert Bridges.

The main point is that the interruption of the flow of the main sentence shall be made clear to the listener, but it will be seen from the above examples that the interruptions vary considerably in 'value'.

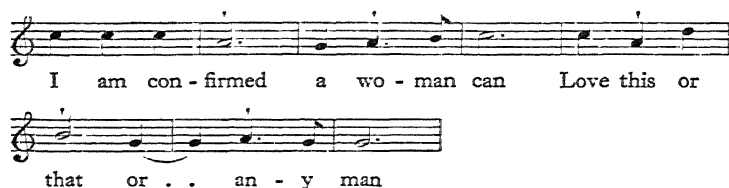
Owing to the permanence of print and the evanescence of speech, an involved sentence is usually easier to disentangle with the eye than with the ear; moreover, the singer is dealing with listeners who necessarily have part of their attention attracted to the music, and he has already been robbed of some of the speaker's oratorical weapons; he cannot, therefore, afford to neglect any methods whereby his meaning can be made immediately intelligible. There are those who claim that they pay little or no attention to the words of a song, but it is improbable that any one ever succeeds, however beautiful the music may be, in resigning himself to listening to that alone; the hearing of an occasional word will set him wondering what the others are.

Moreover, it is easy to show that attention to the adequate phrasing of the words of a song makes the music more interesting as music, for it suggests variations in the musical phrasing and accent that would not ordinarily occur to any one who was considering the melody alone. Variations in the phrasing will occur in strophic songs, or on any occasion where the same melody is used for different words; variations in accent will occur in almost all songs that have a simple rhythmical pattern.

An example of variation of phrasing may be taken from the first two verses of William Barnes's 'Linden Lea', set to music by Vaughan Williams:



Sir John Suckling and Henry Lawes will provide us with a good example of the verbal accent running contrary to, and relieving the monotony of, the more formal musical accent:



When songs are treated in this way—as they must be in order to make the words easily intelligible to the listener—the singer, who for the moment may be giving his attention almost entirely to a reasonable treatment of the words, succeeds in presenting the music in a much more interesting form. There is a companion crime to singing out of tune; it may be called singing out of sense, and it provides us with the explanation of the extraordinary dullness of some singing which in other respects is technically excellent. One of the most frequent crimes of this kind consists in singing through commas, due, no doubt, to a not very discriminating loyalty to legato.

The practice of singing songs to people in a language they do not understand is sometimes regarded as pedantic and absurd. Those who hold such an opinion will naturally ask what is the good of taking trouble about the verbal subtleties of a foreign lyric when such things must necessarily be lost on the audience. The answer is that though the verbal subtleties are lost the musical consequences of them are not. There follows from this the curious result that in singing to any such audiences a first-class understanding of the words is of more importance than an unimpeachable accent; but he is a brave man who sings to a foreign audience in their own language. Incidentally, there seems to be a fair number of singers who sing foreign languages with a more than passable accent, but the number of those who give

indisputable evidence of thoroughly understanding their own is perceptibly fewer.

These questions which the singer has to clear up in his mind by reference to the spoken word enable him, from his special position, to throw some light upon certain points in connexion with what may be called the modern 'accent' controversy; for it is plain that he cannot suggest in his singing the characteristics of interesting speech unless he has a very clear idea of what that speech is.

The progress of democracy has its course marked by the removal from power of those whose tyranny has become unbearable, but it is not always the tyrant's worst faults that are responsible for his downfall. There is evidence that the accent of a certain section of the so-called educated classes, especially that section which is associated with Oxford and Cambridge, has been making itself unpopular in certain quarters. At first sight, it is not clear why these English universities should not be allowed to talk their own language in their own way without Irish, Scottish, or American interference and criticism. The Welsh, by the by, having an interesting living language of their own and no particular political grievances to sublimate, seem indifferent to the 'English accent'. Those who contemptuously refer to the 'haw, haw', or 'Oxford' accent, often try to find reasons for their dislike of it on the ground of bad diction and articulation. But is that what really worries them? Does one become irritated with the imperfect utterance of a child provided its meaning is clear? I venture to think that the real ground for criticism lies elsewhere. Any section of the community will, as a rule, endure patiently the 'accent' of another, provided that the thoughts are not expressed in a 'tone of voice' which indicates antagonism or a sense of superiority; in the same way that a child will accept a simple arithmetical fact when it is not presented with a strong flavour of irritation. At the same time it must not be forgotten

that there is in every one a strong tendency to be well disposed to those who use the speech of his own tribe or class, and to be more or less suspicious of those who do not. This rapid instinctive classification undoubtedly has its uses, but it is a misuse of words to call 'incorrect' an accent that arouses your prejudices or dislikes. Some people dislike the negro type of countenance, but no one ever calls it incorrect, nor are the negroes said to wear their faces with an accent.

When these distinctions are not kept clearly in mind, all discussions about 'correctness' of speech and accent have very little value except as an indication of the degree to which those taking part in them are under the influence of class or national prejudice.

For practical purposes it is very easy to arrive at a definition of correct speech.<sup>1</sup> Any speech which does both parts of its job properly is correct: from which it follows that an accent which is correct on one occasion is incorrect on another. If an English schoolboy should address the remark 'Wotnutkstrawnrything' (his colloquial equivalent for the words 'what an extraordinary thing') to a slightly deaf American visitor, the American will probably have no idea what the boy is saying. The grammarian, the governess, the Irishman, and the Scot<sup>2</sup> will then proceed to give all the reasons except the right one for regarding this way of speaking as incorrect. It will certainly be called ugly and slovenly. Whether it is ugly or not depends upon the boy's voice; as far as slovenliness is concerned, the syllables that remain are often pronounced quite clearly, and abbreviations are not necessarily slovenly—in writing, is it slovenly to put 'St.' for Street, or, in speaking, to say 'Ma'am' for Madam when addressing royalty?<sup>3</sup>

This form of speech is wrong in its particular context because it is unintelligible to the person to whom the

<sup>1</sup> See also Chapter VIII.

<sup>2</sup> There is no order of merit implied in this list.

<sup>3</sup> The mere commoner has to be satisfied with 'mum', or even 'm' in the answer 'yes 'm'.

remark is addressed ; but, said to another boy, it conveys the meaning easily and accurately, and the neat elision of unnecessary syllables should command our admiration. There are not wanting those who think that trying to make a schoolboy carry on his ordinary conversation in the manner of a pedant will tend to make him impressive later in the pulpit or on the platform. Boys who are susceptible to such influence are usually prigs, and a method for making a prig impressive has yet to be invented.

In some ways the problems of the singer in the matter of pronunciation are simpler than they are for the speaker, for the singer is engaged in an art which—like other arts—is concerned with the use of certain conventional symbols. He is justified in using a more precise and careful form of articulation, a form that would tend to appear stilted and pompous in ordinary conversation—in fact, he is not only justified in doing so, but obliged to, for the casual methods of ordinary intercourse do not accord with the conditions under which his art is carried on.

This principle is very generally recognized, though there is, unfortunately, on occasions, a tendency to suppose that the required dignity is given to English speech by presenting it with a foreign accent or with some capricious deference to archaic forms of spelling.

Since the public singer so often sings to a very mixed audience, he has to seek for a kind of *esperanto* of pronunciation which is intelligible and inoffensive to all. Here, again, things are made a little easier for him because there are reasons why all accents tend to be softened down during singing. The Welshman cannot render the nose of his phrase *retroussé* when the composer has made it *aquiline*, nor can the most loyal of Etonians drawl the words of the early eighteenth-century Tambourin, 'Viens dans ce bocage, belle Aminte'.

The reason why vowels tend to be softened down during singing and to lose some of their clear-cut spoken characteristics is too complicated to be entered

into here. Those, however, who are anxious to give their opinions (and there seem to be a good many who like doing this) upon the subject of vowel-sounds in singing would be well advised to acquaint themselves with the pioneer work of Dr. W. A. Aikin, with the work of D. C. Miller in America, and with the extremely interesting and important work lately published by Sir Richard Paget.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Human Speech*. (Kegan Paul.)



## CHAPTER VI

### ART AND LIFE, THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND INTERDEPENDENCE

#### § 1. *Mainly Analytic*

TOLSTOY, in his book *What is Art?* has been at considerable pains to show how inadequate are the definitions and discussions of a large number of writers on this subject. His own main object seems to be to work towards the conclusion that only that which is ennobling and also appreciable by mankind in general is entitled to be called great art. His writings have the great merit of clarity—a virtue not common in works upon art—and he gives an easily intelligible definition of what he means by this elusive monosyllable.

‘Art is a human activity, consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings that he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them.’<sup>1</sup>

Discussion without definition is liable to be extremely unfruitful, but people often add great difficulties to their attempts at definition by a kind of philosophical

<sup>1</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?* Translated by Aylmer Maude. Oxford University Press, Centenary Edition, vol. 18.

The vague feeling of dissatisfaction that I felt after first reading this excellent book must have been because the book as a whole gives the impression—though the definition is fairly inclusive—that Tolstoy wishes to exclude from art, for moral reasons, much that most educated people would include. In other words, the title implies a treatise, while the subject-matter is often a sermon; but on a second reading one settles down into one’s pew, so to speak, to enjoy something vastly superior to what is usually heard under those conditions.

Two men may be equally dexterous. One may employ his dexterity to amuse children by doing conjuring tricks, another to annoy people by picking their pockets. The reprehensible applications of the skill of the second do not reduce its degree as skill, nor is the first less able with his hands merely because his ability may have been gained at the expense of the mental and physical discomfort of a large number of rabbits. (See Tolstoy’s savage but amusing attack upon Opera.)

conscientiousness that leads them far beyond the subject in hand—this may be tested by trying to frame a definition of 'rhythm' that covers all the meanings one has seen attached to the word. To an inquiring American visitor in London, it may be sufficient 'definition' of St. Paul's Cathedral to say that it is a very large building with a dome that he will see in front of him as he walks up a certain street. One is not obliged to say what the cathedral 'is', or to give the chemical composition of the foundation-stone or the name of the designer, though all these things might be included in the 'isness' of the building. The obvious objection here is that the cathedral has not been defined but merely 'placed'. If you are a philosopher you may argue that its position does not enter into the definition of a cathedral, but if you are an American visitor that may be the only thing about it that you want to know.

In the subject under discussion, therefore, it will be of more practical value to base our definition of art not upon what it is but upon what it does. From this point of view, a work of art may be defined as something made by human agency which gives pleasure by stimulating the imagination.<sup>1</sup> It may do other things, but it must do that. From which it follows that something may easily be a work of art by accident, or, on the other hand, fail to be one in spite of any intention or 'self-expression' of its author. The essence of a work of art is its ability to cause some activity in the imagination of the beholder, reader, or listener. In other words, the main business of any art is to attract the imagination into some field and leave it, within those limits, free to roam there. In most arts there are certain subsidiary pleasures more directly connected with the senses. These are considerable in some kinds of music and painting, but negligible in reading printed poetry to oneself; but, great or small, their presence is no more than an added pleasure to the main purpose of the art.

According to this definition, a Grecian urn which

<sup>1</sup> From this definition one must expressly exclude certain drugs.

gives pleasure by its colour and proportions is not a work of art unless, like the one to which Keats wrote an ode, it passes from the realm of pottery into that of sculpture. There are those who may object that this is an unnecessary and unjustifiable restriction of the meaning of the word 'art'. The answer is that the practice of loading some poor little monosyllable with a vast variety of meanings always causes it to break down under the strain. It thus becomes permanently incapable of carrying any one clear meaning, to the great confusion of all those who try to use it as a vehicle of thought. At present, the word 'art' (as a shortened form of the term 'fine-art') has to attend to the wants of the nine muses, and it is quite time that a society for the prevention of cruelty to monosyllables insisted upon a new word being found to serve the needs of pottery, house-decoration, boxing, cooking, and so on.

If this is the essence of art, it matters little whether the artist *expresses* himself—about which a good deal of fuss is liable to be made—so long as he *impresses* us or some future recipient. A work of art must be a stimulation, it need not necessarily be a direct communication from the mind of the artist to others. If some one happens to be particularly sensitive to certain colour combinations, the pleasure and interest aroused in his mind while he looks at a picture may be more intense and varied than those occupying the painter's mind when he made the picture. On such occasions the artist has a right to take credit for the effect which he has produced, but if he says that that is what he 'meant' by his picture we are justified in having a higher opinion of his art than of his veracity.

The mention of the word 'veracity' brings to mind the fact that in the confines of art itself there is no art-morality: the end achieved completely justifies the means. Some singers, for instance, eke out certain vocal effects by the aid of facial expression and by gesture. The celebrated French actress, Yvette Guilbert, made the most astonishing success of this kind of

art, but her gramophone records are sometimes pitifully ineffective to those who know her on the stage. This sometimes provokes people to say that they do not call that singing. It is not, however, a matter of importance what it is called: the only question at all pertinent is whether, as a performance, it succeeds. If it does, its value as art is not destroyed by denying it some specific label. If it does not, there is no need to call any further evidence (or abuse) for the prosecution.

For the artist, the danger in this kind of mixed art is its difficulty. Every clearly defined art has a set of conventions which come into the mind subconsciously, but very definitely, as soon as one enters a picture gallery or theatre, or sees some one stand up to sing. If a set of drawings—where one of the conventions is that all colours shall be suggested by different shades of the same colour—is being examined, and among them there is one where the artist, for some caprice, perhaps, has put a coloured section in one corner, the mind is irritated at being jerked out of the attitude it has been persuaded to take up. A skilled artist can, however, sometimes make very pleasing effects and suggestions by an art which is neither pure drawing nor painting; and it is only an exaggerated passion for classifying that would lead any one to object to this.

It is very generally assumed that every one knows what singing means. On the technical side, this assumption is justified, for every one knows that singing means the use of the voice to produce words and a melody (in the sense of a series of notes of definite pitch) at the same time. But on the artistic side the ideas of beginners and others that I have met are very far from clear; and the lack of a definite conception of what they are aiming at is naturally a serious bar to their progress.

The main object of the singer as an artist is the same as that of the painter as an artist, namely, to stimulate in certain specific directions the imagination of those to whom he is addressing himself. If a picture succeeds in

doing this, no one who is looking at it as a work of art cares whether it is done in water-colour, oil, or pastel. The non-expert may not know, and the expert ought not to care, whether it was done with the usual end of a camel-hair brush or the back of a tooth-brush. In any case as soon as either of them begins to think about how the picture was made he leaves the world of art for that of craft. It would be absurd to say that any one ought not to be interested in the consideration of technique: if he is anxious to paint pictures himself, it is very necessary for him to know about it. But it is not for the stimulation of such interest that the artist paints his picture, though occasionally the professional with one eye on art and the other on advertisement may find it convenient to indulge in technical 'stunts'.

The fact that people who are interested in art are usually also interested in its technique gives rise to the idea that the two interests are identical. There seems to be a widespread idea among those responsible for school curricula that grammar should be classified under literature, but grammar is a form of science, and literature a form of art which provides data for the science of grammar. A field of potatoes may provide examples for a book of arithmetic, but arithmetic is not a form of agriculture. There are those who take pleasure and pride in being able to hum the main themes of all the Beethoven symphonies which are mentioned to them by number or by key; this is quite a reasonable form of self-indulgence, but it is not an 'artistic' pleasure, it is much more nearly allied to the collector's attitude of mind—a pleasure in possession.

As an artist, the painter has one great advantage over the singer in that, as a rule, he is not watched while he is working. If he were always watched, as the singer was till the invention of the gramophone and wireless, there might have been invented a ritual for him too, so that any one who did not stand 'firmly planted on both feet' in front of his canvas and describe certain graceful curves with his brush would be regarded as a poor kind

of painter, with no style, especially if he did not develop enough 'personality' to shine through the back of his velvet coat and impress the 'audience'.

The singer, who uses an evanescent medium, always has to be there while people are looking at his 'picture'. As an inevitable consequence, he is always liable to be self-conscious in the wrong way, and to identify himself, and thus lead his audience to try to identify him, with the 'picture' he is trying to paint. The painter is allowed to see expressions in other people, the singer is always being told that he must feel (or have felt) the emotions he intends to portray. Translated into its parallel absurdity, this is much the same as telling the painter that he must be or have been the things he intends to paint. Or, to put it more fairly by confining it to the emotions, it is equivalent to saying that a painter cannot represent a man suffering from furious anger unless he can remember the expression *on his own face* when he has been furiously angry. This seems to condemn him, if he is of a peaceful disposition, to picking a violent quarrel with some one near a mirror so that he may turn and watch himself when he judges he has arrived at the right degree of rage.

Speaking generally, people do not observe themselves when they are under the stress of real emotion; visually, as a rule, it is impossible, and though it is possible to hear the sound of one's own voice, it is to be presumed that one's attention is otherwise occupied at moments of intense feeling. Popular talk, and even skilled (or at least expensive) teaching, often contains the suggestion that a singer's interpretation will not be really convincing till he has had some shattering emotional experience. Such an idea is evidently based on the assumption that when he has experienced some emotion he will be able to tell us about it in song. Superficially, this idea seems to have reason on its side, but a little careful examination shows that it is wrong in every possible way. It begins with the assumption that passing through an experience necessarily endows one with

the power of describing it; it assumes that powers of observation are at their best at times when experience shows that they are not; it denies by implication any powers of imagination and exaggeration that are usually supposed to be the prerogatives of the 'artist'; and finally, or rather primarily, it is based on an entire misconception of the singer's business, which is not to relate his own experiences but to make the audience think about theirs.

Here exactly is that misconception of the main business of their art which makes so many young singers self-conscious and dull. A young woman cannot be expected to sing 'Oft have I sighed for him that hears me not' with a great deal of conviction to an audience composed of a mixture of critical contemporaries, boy-friends, and disapproving dowagers, if she and every one else in the room suppose that the song can only be sung adequately by some one suffering from the pangs of unrequited love. I suppose it has not occurred to all these simple-minded people to go a little farther and wonder how it was that Campion came to forswear his sex in writing the song.

This misconception of the function of the artist in the world of song has had the reciprocally unfortunate results of making men worse singers and singers worse men; and it has had the additional effect of making the singing of many women—especially young women—extremely dull. It should be a consolation for some of these—and certainly it would be for their audiences—to know that the tones and expressions of the softer passions are learnt chiefly by being in the conventionally (but not actually) more creditable position of having others dying of love for them, rather than being in a moribund condition themselves. And as every one knows that the artist paints 'expressions' on the faces and in the attitudes of his figures by watching other people, so every one should realize that the singer learns to make his voice perform a corresponding function in the world of sound by a precisely analogous process.

Those who have heard others sigh on occasions when their own affections were not strongly engaged are those who will give the best suggestion of the 'lovelorn piteous appeal' in song.<sup>1</sup>

The very adequate singing of an intensely moving love-song does not imply any great qualities of attractiveness in a singer, man or woman, in ordinary life; nor any capacity for being a great lover; nor indeed any particular character of any kind more than that which is the essence of that much-abused term 'the artistic temperament', namely, a great sensitiveness of observation; in this case, in the world of sound.

It may be said with obvious justice that powers of observation are useless unless there is something to observe, and that therefore real experience of the more dramatic and emotional side of human life is, in fact, necessary for the artist. No one would, I think, deny the use of such things: it is their necessity which is being called in question.

Does any normal being arrive at the age of twenty without having experienced liking and being liked, disliking and its opposite, jealousy, anger, sadness, happiness, and so on? The mode of expression in song of a rapturous lover is similar to that of an affectionate parent or child, intensified on the one hand by the artist's power of imagination, and on the other—an extremely important point—by stronger and more stimulating poetic language. If the singer treats the poet's words adequately they will do nearly all his 'expression' for him.

The tissue of despair is composed of the same psychological strands as that of sadness, but they are more closely woven. The closer weaving is the combined effect of the imaginations of the poet, the composer, and the singer. If one can only sing of the things one has experienced, the same thing applies presumably to writing, in which case novelists in general and writers of detective fiction in particular must live very exciting

<sup>1</sup> See *The Plutonian Fire*, O. Henry.



lives. Moreover, if only those who have experienced despair can express it, it seems to follow that only those of the audience who have had a similar experience can appreciate such expression, and it is a pity that the tragedian's flowers should waste their bitterness on the mild air breathed by a normal audience.

One merit that can be claimed (but usually is not) for experience of real emotion is that it tends to make people less self-conscious in general, and so tends to make them less so in the strong light of public, or the milder light of drawing-room, performances.

It is easy to make the mistake of assuming that because one idea is obviously wrong the opposite idea must be necessarily right. Thus, although direct experiences of all particular kinds of events and states of mind are by no means necessary to the artist, it is quite possible that all his actual experiences may be useful to him. For the singer and actor one may make even a further concession, for most of us who do not live with very talkative relatives are condemned to hear the sound of our own voices more than that of any one other, and it is possible that one may observe, in a kind of subconscious way, the sound of one's own voice under stress of emotion. None the less, it is an entirely gratuitous assumption that this is the only way in which a singer can learn to make those modifications in his voice that are necessary for the adequate 'interpretation' of his songs and operas.

To sum up the whole matter, this part of the singer's business is learnt by training the powers of auditory observation and not by unleashing the emotions.

Conventional teaching is full of the fallacy of the direct connexion between the life of the individual and his art. It is shown in such phrases as 'Let yourself go more' and 'Throw yourself into the part'. The last is a particularly unfortunate phrase, because, if the part is a tragic one and the actor a mild individual, it is not clear how the part will gain by this process of auto-injection. If the instructions became 'Let your voice go more' and 'Throw your audience into the part', they would, without

reaching any great intensity of didactic brilliance, at least have the negative virtue of not being misleading.

In the interaction between the life and art of any individual, artistic gifts do not differ from any other highly-developed powers, which, quite independently of character or temperament, will naturally alter the experiences of the possessor and his relations with other people. 'L'homme de talent trouve dans la vie des indulgences analogues à celles qu'y rencontre le tyran; ses caprices sont tolérés: la loi devient faible contre sa fantaisie.'<sup>1</sup>

Which all goes to prove that the conventional ideas about the matter are just the reverse of the truth, for a man's artistic gifts have much more effect on his life than his life has upon his art.

And what is termed 'the artistic temperament' is no more than a hypothetical cause for a series of results which are the perfectly normal consequences of giving any human being, artist or not, rather more liberty and power than his intellect and character can stand. From which two conclusions follow: one is that the so-called artistic temperament is by no means confined to artists, and the other that the best artists are sometimes entirely free from it.<sup>2</sup>

## § 2. *Mainly Synthetic*

Having removed from the artist nearly all the attributes that make him 'beautiful and dear' to the heart of the biography reader, it is now our duty to provide him

<sup>1</sup> André Maurois, *Méïpe*.

<sup>2</sup> Another quotation from the same book is of interest here. André Maurois is writing about the great tragic actress Mrs. Siddons. 'Elle passait la matinée à laver ou à repasser le linge, à préparer le repas de son mari, à s'occuper de l'enfant qui lui était né. L'après-midi, elle apprenait ses rôles nouveaux; le soir elle jouait, et souvent, en rentrant, après le théâtre, achevait encore sa lessive.'

'Ce mélange de vertu bourgeoise et de talents poétiques plaisait infiniment au public anglais.'

It is doubtful whether the modern film 'fan' would be so easily pleased.

with something of more practical utility in the carrying on of his business. From now on we will confine our attention almost entirely to the art of singing. The discussion of any one art will bring out principles that can be applied to all, and singing is a particularly suitable choice, since, in one way or another, so many people practise it.

The actor and the singer, as every one knows, belong to that class of artists known as interpreters, but we shall see later that there is a certain amount of justification for the grandiloquent way of referring to the actor's role as 'creating the part', which, strictly speaking, means no more than interpreting it for the first time in public. I have never heard a singer use a similar term when he has introduced a new song to the public; perhaps it is because he has to deal with both words and music that he shies at claiming this double creative act. Autobiographies and anecdotes of famous singers seem to indicate that it is not only humility that withholds them.

The qualifications necessary for becoming a fine singer are varied, and they are not of a kind that can be put in any order of merit. They include a dramatic sense, literary taste, and good musicianship as endowments of the mind. On the physical side, a good vocal mechanism is necessary, and this must be taken as including something which is not common among English-speaking people, namely, an ability to make rapid and accurate movements of the lips, tongue, and soft palate. Most of the foregoing qualifications imply what is called a good 'ear', not only a good musical ear as the term is usually understood, but also a good discriminative ear for vowels and qualities of sound.

This brings us to the heart of the matter, for the singer must never cease to train to the utmost all the powers of the ear. In the matter of tone-production alone, this involves a very careful attention to the delicacies of vowel-sounds on the one hand and to the general quality of all sorts of different voices on the other, and, in addition to this, a quick perception of

the characteristic sounds of all orchestral instruments should be cultivated.<sup>1</sup>

The full justification for all this must be postponed, as we are already digressing somewhat from our main subject, which for the moment is the artistic and not the technical side of singing.

To begin with the dramatic sense: the singer must always be very observant of the minutely varying shades of vocal quality and kinds of speaking that are associated with different emotions and sentiments. Let us take two as examples—irritation and indignation. I hope it is not an unnecessary cynicism that makes me assume that these feelings and their expressions are familiar to every one. If it is said that the 'diction' of irritation or peevishness is rather thin in quality, its pitch rather high, its rate rapid as a rule, and its emphases effected dynamically (i.e. with a sudden increase of power), every one will probably agree—as they will also when it is said that for indignation the quality is comparatively full, the pitch low, the pace deliberate, and the emphases effected chiefly by 'suspense'. But this kind of grammatical analysis is about as much use in learning to sing as ordinary grammar is in learning to write, i.e. hardly any use at all. The mild enthusiasts who were responsible for the literary part of education in my early days were accustomed to say, or imply, that skill in the art of writing was the reward of the diligent student of grammar; more especially Latin grammar. They were evidently suffering from a natural or acquired taste for the science of grammar. But it is not necessary to assume or to try to prove that a subject is of great practical utility merely because it happens to be interesting or lucrative. One may be (as I am) greatly interested in what may be called the acoustical grammar of vocal sounds, without being so foolish as to try to prove that it is impossible to be a great singer unless one studies

<sup>1</sup> This last has been recommended by Sir Henry Wood for other excellent reasons: it is here recommended as an assistance towards variety of tone-quality in the voice.

such a subject. The knowledge which Adelina Patti and Enrico Caruso possessed of this and kindred subjects may safely be assumed to have been negligible. Patti was reported to have made, late in life, a 'judge-like' inquiry about the diaphragm (the absence of any sense of muscular tension in this muscle may have been a hint in Victorian times that it was not quite nice to think of things so near the digestive organs). Caruso knew about it, apparently, because he was said to be able to push a grand piano away from the wall by getting between the two and taking a deep breath, which fact might be used as an advertisement for Caruso, or for castors, or even for floor-polish.

In the course of the study of comparative anatomy, one may learn that men are classified as bipeds, and dogs as quadrupeds, but a child that cannot see for itself that men have two legs and dogs four should be gently weaned from any idea it has of becoming a great painter, and have its attention drawn to things not directly concerned with eye-observation and memory.

The application of all this to the subject in hand is plain, for if you wish to suggest emotions when you are singing you have, like any great singer, to exercise, not analyse; and the first thing that you have to exercise is your ear, not your voice. Your voice will not suggest, except by accident, a sound or a nuance that you have not got quite clear in your ear-memory already. As a rule, the painter has a model or a landscape in front of him while he is painting. The singer cannot have anything similar while he is singing: he has to rely on memory. But in the mere practice of tone-production how many students seek for, or masters insist upon, a model before the ear. The place of models is too often taken by semi-scientific anatomical and acoustical catch-phrases. Even correct science is of little direct use to the singer for reasons that have already been stated. For the teacher, however, the matter is different. The human mind has an inveterate tendency towards making up theories on insufficient data. Vocal teaching

and vocal literature are full of these fantastic flights of the imagination, and there are not wanting those whose mentality is such that they would try to prove that the low notes of a bass voice actually come from the boots, if the phrase had not already been used as a would-be humorous metaphor.

Some of these theories have the virtue that they tend to distract attention from the throat, and others the negative merit that pupils, as often as not, merely repeat them without understanding them. The rest of their influence is pernicious, but they will survive till that happy time comes when the artist and scientist can work more sympathetically with one another.<sup>1</sup>

From what has gone before, it follows that the young professional, let us say, instead of embarking on an orgy of sentiment, emotion, or crime, has merely to store his ear-memory with examples drawn from the everyday experiences of the normal 'bright young thing'. Most singers talk too much. They should be listening; this rests their voices and trains their ears.

At this point we come to an interesting difficulty. Among the ordinary experiences of modern life come a considerable number of visits to the theatre, opera, and concert-room, so that, as one always has to 'sketch from memory' when singing, it is not always possible to know whether one is sketching something one has heard directly, so to speak, or copying a picture made by some one else. The effect of this in creative art is well known, for the early works of a composer of genius often show signs of the older masters by whom he has been influenced. This is by no means necessarily a bad trait, and if the genius of the young composer is of the robust

<sup>1</sup> 'As is well known, those whose concern with the arts is most direct often tend to deprecate a scientific approach as being likely to impair appreciation.'

'The sight of persons irritated with science because they care for poetry (Whatever the sun may be, it is certainly not a ball of flaming gas, cries D. H. Lawrence), or of scientists totally immune from the influence of civilization becomes still more regrettable when we realise how unnecessary it is.' Ogden and Richards, *Meaning of Meaning*.

growing order the more apparent traces of such influences disappear.

In singing, as in other arts, it is a very good exercise to do such a thing consciously by occasionally making as exact a copy as possible of specimens of good singing. All good singers have a style of their own that makes them sing certain songs particularly well, and, as every one wishes his art to be as versatile as possible, it is well to choose the best specimens from a large number of good singers. In general, the student should copy the voice of one, the style of another, the rhythm of a third, and the diction of a fourth; and to the question 'Is my art to be a thing of shreds and patches like that?' we may answer 'Yes, your art is to be a thing of shreds and patches like that, and, if you are careful with the weaving, people will be pleased with its beauty and be quite unconscious of the details of its origin'.

Then comes the question of literary taste. It is necessary for the singer to be interested in literature in general, and in poetry in particular, because an important part of his art lies in suggesting their 'meaning' to other people. Vocal music may be divided roughly into operatic and lyric: in the first, dramatic prose or poetry is set to music, and in the other, lyric poetry. You do not need to cultivate 'good' taste in literature. What is necessary is the cultivation of *your* taste, i.e. the capacity for knowing what you yourself genuinely do or do not like. No one is likely to make interesting to other people things that he is not certain he finds interesting himself. If you do not find some lyric poetry in Keats and Shelley that gives you intense pleasure you may find some in Shakespeare or the seventeenth-century people. If you do not find it in either of these groups you will at least find in that fact an explanation of the public's preference, as a *lieder-singer*, for some one who has neither your voice nor your technique—a phenomenon that would otherwise merely arouse your puzzled jealousy. On the other hand, it must be admitted that the operatic singer may arrive at a considerable degree of excellence in his

particular art without being endowed with any great capacity for the appreciation of literary subtleties.

The qualification 'good musicianship' introduces some interesting points for discussion. The term can be understood in more than one way, and any one is liable to become confused unless he makes quite clear to himself whether he is applying the term in the world of art or the world of technique. The matter can be put more clearly by an example: The audience do not care whether the singer is reading his stuff at sight or whether what they hear is the result of hours of laborious study, but the instrumentalists who have attended the same rehearsal may care a great deal, and often express themselves freely on the subject. In the same way, scenery skilfully painted upon flimsy material may be a source of delight to the audience and merely a stimulus to blasphemous invective on the part of the stage-carpenter.

Music, as an art, is entirely concerned with effects upon the sense of hearing: it obviously belongs to the world of sound. But the convenience of recording it upon something more permanent than the air, by means of visual signs, is so enormous that the fundamental nature of music is often forgotten, insomuch that a good musician has been defined as one who can hear with his eyes. The power of rapidly interpreting visual signs so that they call up the corresponding sound-ideas in the mind of the reader (either as sound-memories themselves or to be again retranslated into the muscular movements that correspond to the producing of the sound by an instrument or the voice) is undoubtedly one of extreme importance. This capacity for 'reading' depends upon a connexion between the sight- and hearing-centres in the brain.

This connexion, however, may be quite highly developed without the artistic powers in connexion with either the eye or the ear being themselves highly developed; so that occasions are by no means uncommon where the fluent reader is a dull player. In the



playing of keyed instruments also, where the notes (as far as pitch is concerned) are ready made, the arrival at a fairly high degree of skill does not even imply a good ear. The success of many reputed good vocal sight-readers is only apparent: the time-values are right and they do not attempt to sing a fourth when a fifth is written.

But what many of them do sing is neither one nor the other, to an accurate ear, and the general artistic and musical result is of little value. There are certain lack-of-technical-training excuses that can be made for the slurred inaccurate intervals that many 'musicians' produce in their vocal sight-reading, but the chief reason is one that would be met with indignant denial, namely, that their ears have not been properly trained. In the days when I was taught the piano, it was apparently a crime to possess an ear. The sense of sight was sufficient to tell what notes had to be struck and in what order. To play your piece without your book was almost as great a crime as to say your repetition with it. It seems an extraordinary perversity that, in an art which is designed to appeal to the sense of hearing, the ear should have been held in such small esteem. Phrases such as 'He can only play by ear', though not meant to be, are really a compliment to a person's musicianship. (We do not hear 'He can only draw by sight'.)

Choir- and chorus-masters tire out and irritate their singers (especially the efficient ones) by allowing the inefficient to 'read' or sing a passage wrong over and over again, instead of correcting them by appealing to the ear, with the passage played correctly on the piano or organ. Their perhaps justifiable irritation with their choir's want of reading-power should not blind them to the fact that as soon as a singer sings an interval wrong, or comes in on a wrong beat, there is automatically established a memory of the incorrect passage.

This incorrect memory is sometimes strongly persistent, probably owing to association with similar but not identical passages; and is by no means always due to

stupidity or inattention. It can only be ousted by means of establishing a stronger memory, or calling to aid a stronger association. The simplest way of doing this is to play the passage correctly while the singers listen and look at their music. There is then established a correct association between the sounds and the visual signs. Why should a concert-practice, which has for its object the pleasing of the ear of the concert-goer, be mistaken for a sight-reading lesson? Why not an ear-memory lesson, which is much more to the immediate purpose? Why not hear and remember (which has to be done finally) instead of see and interpret?

In other words, sight-reading practice should be kept separate from rehearsals for repertoire.

The main answer, of course, to these questions is that, until the invention of the phonograph, music could only be recorded permanently by visual signs; and a moment's thought will show that this invention has not done away with the immense advantage to a musician of the power of 'reading'. This advantage has, however, been allowed to tyrannize over people's attitude towards music, so that a capacity for 'reading' has come to be regarded as the distinguishing mark of the true musician. Well—as they say in simple stories—it isn't. The distinguishing mark of a musician is the possession of an 'ear'. For it is a matter of primary importance to note that all the subtler parts of music, especially vocal music, are entirely unrecordable visually. It might be possible to invent a more complete notation, but its complications would most probably be more trouble than they were worth.

Nevertheless, the printed song as it stands is full of false suggestions to the singer. Over and over again it gives him definite instructions to sustain a note so long that it is quite impossible to take a breath without being late at an important point—to the great detriment of the rhythm. Moreover, the conventional way of printing the words under the music gives an entirely wrong impression of the exact time at which a syllable (in the

grammatical sense) must be started (see Chapter XIII on 'Rhythm'). One of the first things a singer must do is to free his ear from this tyranny of the visual sense.

Some modern song-writers, realizing the inadequacy of the visual signs in other ways, load the vocal score with a wealth of instructions. These seem chiefly to be based on the assumption that the singer will not have read the words with any intelligence—and, to be quite frank, this has been known to happen. But the instructions themselves and the composition in general do not always prove that the composer has himself performed this necessary preliminary operation. Not only song-composers in general, but great song-writers in particular, often need a considerable amount of 'editing' by the singer. A song may be really great because the general mood of the poem is reflected and intensified by the form and harmony of the music, although many of the subtler points of the poet's words may not be given due attention. For, after the musician's primary inspiration in the setting of a poem, the development of his musical ideas may occupy his mind to the exclusion of the claims of certain minor points in the poem. This may prevent the song from being perfect, but does not prevent it from being great; and a fine singer can bring it very close to perfection if he is fully alive to certain subtleties that the composer has apparently missed. (One may agree with Mr. Ernest Newman's estimate of the comparative merits of Brahms and Wolf as song-writers and yet, as a singer, sometimes find Brahms more interesting to sing because he gives the singer more to do on his own account.)

This important part of the singer's work is not much aided by the instruction 'tenderly' or, more remarkable still, 'with expression' when the singer himself has not already noticed that the song at that point requires a particular kind of subtle emphasis. The greatest of all song-writers knew better than to bother his interpreters with such banalities—perhaps because he was fortunate in having as a friend the intelligent singer Vogl. It

may be assumed that Schubert supposed that all expression-marks for the singer are inherent in the words of a song, for after some general instruction about the tempo he leaves him to work out his own artistic salvation. Does any one really suppose that it is necessary to put 'gaily', 'cheerfully', or 'with spirit' at the head of 'Das Wandern'; or 'heavily, with a certain noble resignation', or some such pomposity, at the beginning of 'Dido's Lament'? A song cannot be made fool-proof by stage directions.

Half the teaching of interpretation can be summed up in the three syllables 'READ THE WORDS'; the other half consists in that patient analysis which elucidates the relation between technical cause and artistic effect.

It is very rare, outside the realms of the mentally deficient, to hear any one putting the wrong kind of accent or expression into the words that he uses to express his own thoughts, but it is the commonest thing to hear this done with the words which are set to music. So that the instruction 'read the words' must be amplified to mean that they must be studied till all the meaning of the poet has been grasped to such an extent that it becomes in a sense something that you yourself want to convey. After that, a failure to say it properly means that your technique is at fault, and you must set to work to bring this up to the required level. It is in this further matter that the services of a skilled teacher of interpretation come in, for he ought to be able to tell you the exact technical reasons why you have failed to produce the required effect upon your auditors.

The singer has to learn to do something similar to the action of a painter who steps back to look at his picture, though the evanescence of his medium makes this very difficult. He has, in a literal sense, to learn to sing to himself: he has to dissociate his attention from the physical and mental effort of making the song in order to listen to the sound of his voice coming back to him and affecting him as a member of his audience. Until he achieves this dual personality he cannot make much

progress in practising the art of interpretation by himself. For there are a good many people who get considerable pleasure subjectively from the act of singing, and some of them, by no means unduly conceited, genuinely suppose that this pleasure is shared by the listener. The capacity for amusing oneself and for interesting other people are, however, not necessarily coincident. This fact usually has to be broken gently to the possessors of good voices, and some of them never really believe it.

To sum up:—both popular and expert talk on all these subjects is very likely to obscure from the young singer the entrance to the narrow path that leads to his own artistic salvation. Preoccupation with ‘personality’, ‘temperament’, ‘expression’, and the visual side of music is the means by which teachers and students perversely distract their attention from the only way to become an artist in the world of song. This consists in the continual training of all the powers of the ear until it becomes extremely sensitive to the minutest changes in quality of sound, unerringly appreciative of the smallest inaccuracy in intervals; to which should be added an especial intolerance for tentatively feeling for the pitch of a note (this detestable habit is almost universal among present-day singers, great and small); and, finally, capable of judging the exact equality of comparatively large intervals of time (the bar rather than the beat), for Rhythm (divesting it of the polysyllabic obfuscations in which the word is usually dressed) depends upon this.

While this training is going on, the experiences of ordinary life, even in a suburb (which to the high-brow is the negation of art and the home of the philistine), will provide the ear with all the varieties of vocal and verbal sounds that are associated with all the emotions and sentiments. You do not need to travel in the great open spaces, or frequent night-clubs, or even seek for a ‘grande passion’—whatever that may be; and if you always keep a clear distinction between artistic experience and real

experience you may finally achieve that blessed but unusual state of being a great artist on the platform without being a great bore off it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I am pleased to find myself in agreement with such an acute thinker as the late Mr. G. K. Chesterton. In 'The Wrong Muse', *Nash's Magazine*, March 1933, he wrote: '... I doubt the whole implication of what may almost be called biological biography. I doubt whether most poetic or artistic inspiration does come, or ever did come, from the affections or appetites of authors considered as private men, not to say primitive monkeys. It is not merely that I think such biological biography is bad for morality or human dignity. It is also that I do seriously think that this elaborate physiology is very bad psychology. My own experience is that affections, whether noble or ignoble, have very little to do with that part of a man by which he thinks and imagines. That part of him has directly to do with truth and beauty; and they are attractions in themselves. That explains why so many perfect works of art have been produced by people who apparently had no history; by a spinster sitting on a sofa, or a monk kneeling in a cell; by Jane Austen or Fra Angelico ...'

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ENGLISH VOICE

THE word 'voice' is used in two different senses. It is used on the one hand for the instrument or mechanism which produces certain sounds, and on the other for the collection of sounds made by that instrument. The want of a clear distinction between these two meanings has led to a great deal of confusion, but the context should show clearly, on each occasion, which is intended. Those who have read books or heard discussions upon vocal matters will know that the word 'voice' is also used for a vague something that comes up from the throat, either 'carried on the breath' or impelled by some strange projectory property of the diaphragm—something somewhat in the nature of a small elastic ball (or collection of balls) which hits against the hard palate and bounces out of the mouth, or, more mysteriously still, finds its way through the 'mask' to the ear of the listener. With this meaning—to dignify it for the moment by such a term—we are not here concerned.

We may begin by considering a very ordinary phrase, such as 'He has a good voice'. This to most people implies that the collection of sounds made by that person in speaking or singing is pleasant to listen to, or, at all events, adequate for the purpose to which it is applied. Now it would cause less confusion if there were some word which was used consistently for the organ which produces the sound, because in this sense every one has a definite voice. In the other sense, however, one person may have several different voices, because on one occasion he can sing or speak, using a series of sounds that are consistent with themselves, while on another occasion he can use a different series of sounds, also consistent with themselves. The consistency spoken of must be understood to be a matter of quality of sound. A good mimic could, in fact, pass himself off as a light 'tenor' to

those who had never heard him sing before, while on another occasion he might sing in his usual voice and be immediately classified as a baritone.

There arises the question, which of these collections of sounds is his voice? It might be extremely difficult, even impossible, for any one who did not know him to decide this question, but the correct answer to it is that they are both his voices, produced by the same voice-mechanism used on each occasion in a different way. Now, however, comes the further consideration: which of these series of sounds is his natural voice or natural way of using the mechanism? Here by the word 'natural' is meant most suitable and least damaging to the mechanism. In this sense it by no means follows that a person's *usual* voice is his natural voice, and reasons will be given for supposing that in the vast majority of cases, especially among the more expensively schooled and universitied class, the English people do not use, for ordinary conversation and for singing, their natural voices.

When speech or singing is taking place, the sound which the listener hears is due primarily to the vibrations of two elastic membranes called the vocal cords, whose unaided efforts would produce little more than a thin 'reedy' squeak were it not for the amplification brought about by the action of the air in the spaces of the throat and mouth—and, on certain occasions, the nose. The final effect which the listener has communicated to him by the intervening external air is due to what may be called a sympathy or co-ordination between the vibrating cords and these air spaces, which are called resonators. For example, a certain amount of effort to make the cords vibrate may on one occasion produce very little external effect, while on another the same amount of effort in this respect may produce a large external effect, as the consequences of nothing more than slight alterations in the size and shape of the air spaces.

An entirely wrong attitude towards this co-ordinated use of the various parts of the instrument may be in-



duced by education, imitation, and self-consciousness. The English-speaking child, like other children, when it is quite young usually produces its voice extremely well. That is to say, it can make sounds of great intensity, and even of great 'volume', with very little conscious effort. This is undoubtedly due in part to the elasticity of the vocal ligaments at that early age, but certainly much more to an instinctive co-ordination between this part of the organ and the air spaces or resonators. But the unrepressed vocalization from childhood's phonological Eden unfortunately troubles the ears of the irritable adults outside, who continually tell the children to make less noise in their expression of emotional states. They are no less frequently being told in their intercourse with their elders to talk more quietly than is natural to them. As time goes on, the English child begins to imitate the repressed, muffled, thin, and 'throaty' tones which form the adult Englishman's conversational raw material; and finally—worst of all for the future singer—the adolescent comes to regard as bad form any way of speaking that conveys enthusiasm, or indeed any clear suggestion of some definite emotion.

As a result of these three main causes of repression in the free use of the voice, the Englishman usually reaches maturity with the sole virtue of quietness in his conversation; and even this carries with it an associated defect, because quietness in speaking tends towards the reduction of articulatory effort.

The influences we have been considering tend also towards a lowering of the general pitch of the conversational tone. Now the use of the vocal cords for long periods in the somewhat relaxed condition which is necessary for producing a low note is very wearing for them—any one may test this for himself by reading out loud for some time on a really low-pitched, conversational note. The attempt to put pressure on the vocal cords in order to speak louder, without at the same time raising the pitch of the voice, is undoubtedly responsible for a good deal of the vocal troubles to which lecturers,

clergy, and public speakers are subject. The cure for such troubles is often, physically speaking, very simple—the speaker has to learn to talk at an obviously higher pitch, but this introduces what may be called psychological difficulties.

Every spoken sentence has some kind of melodic shape, and these shapes, together with their associated emphases, have great significance in the conveying of thoughts in the speaker's mind. A short sentence of five words may easily have one part of its meaning entirely altered by different melodic treatment. We can take an excellent example used by Mr. Lloyd James in one of his talks. A visitor to London is supposed to be asking questions about things that he sees. He asks the question, 'Is that London Bridge?' and the answer is, 'No, it isn't'. He may then reply, 'Oh, I thought it was'. But the same question might have been asked in circumstances when the answer would have been 'Yes, it is', in which case he might still reply, 'Oh, I thought it was'. Now any one who imagines for himself those two situations will find no difficulty in saying that reply of five words in a way that is appropriate to its occasion. He will find no difficulty in saying them so that they indicate—subtly, perhaps, but quite clearly—on the first occasion, disappointment at being wrong, and on the second, satisfaction at being right. People who are learning the principles of declamation for pulpit, stage, or political platform purposes (lawyers and lecturers do not yet seem to realize that it is necessary for them) usually do not find any great difficulty in carrying out the instruction to speak so that the general pitch-level is higher than it is in their habitual conversation. But the employment of an unusual pitch tends to make any one speak in an unusual way, the sentences lose their tunes (in the sense indicated above), and the syllables follow one another at a regular speed, so that there results that tiresome sing-song method of declamation so often heard from sermon-preachers and poetry-readers. As far as pitch is concerned, the correct pro-

cess is similar to that of transposition in music. In general, good declamatory speech is ordinary speech transposed to a higher key and then enlarged and intensified everywhere in proportion: it is higher, louder, and slower, but the sentence-tunes must be the same, and so must the relative durations of the syllables and the positions of the emphases; otherwise the speech becomes very much devitalized, especially in its capacity for conveying interest and emotional suggestions.

It should be clearly stated here that such methods of speech, though they may be termed unusual, would be very wrongly called unnatural. They are methods of speech that approximate very closely to those used by young children. The psychological difficulties are due to the fact that the speaker is liable to feel that he is using an unusual way of speaking; this tends to make him self-conscious and to make him change his other conversational habits. He has to cure this self-consciousness by getting used to hearing himself talk in what appears to him an artificial tone of voice. When he has practised enough at hearing himself do this, no one who first heard him using his voice for making a public speech and did not know him in private life ought to be able to guess that he was not using his usual conversational 'voice'.

The problems that concern the English public speaker and the English singer are very similar in character. They both have to get used to hearing themselves produce a fuller and freer *unusual* tone of voice until it becomes second nature and can be used without self-consciousness. The singer is helped in some of these difficulties by the fact that his melodies are decided for him by the composer, but this unfortunately does not always make him choose the right tone in the sense of quality of vocal sound. The conventional method of voice-training, in which the learner is made to sing exercises on vowel-sounds alone, is also helpful in getting rid of associations with inadequate conversational habits. Many people who find it comparatively easy to get a full

tone when they are singing exercises on some particular vowel do not find it at all easy when words have to be sung to the same melody. This is due partly, but by no means only, to the fact that the vowels are changing all the time and that the muscles of the tongue and lips are also occupied in making consonants.

The chief difficulty of good voice-production for an Englishman singing the words of his own language is that the associations of muscular action are so strong during the making of the words that he immediately tends to use the vocal organs in the same constricted and inadequate way that he is accustomed to employ for his ordinary conversation. It should be noted here that there are, occasionally, people who show just the opposite condition. They talk freely and well, and with suggestion of emotional vitality, but the tones of their singing-voice have a lifeless artificiality. These have to learn to transfer their speech-methods to their singing.

The practice of making English people sing songs in a foreign language is a good one, and in this particular connexion, i.e. that of mere tone-production, it is often a good thing, too, if the language is one that the singer has never used for expressing thoughts in ordinary conversation, because he then has no associations with bad methods of using the voice. When the singer has become used to the sound of his voice in such a foreign language, he is able to transfer this general quality to his own.

It will not be out of place here to describe the experiences of my own training. I found precisely those peculiarities that have been indicated above, namely, a comparative ease in getting a good tone during exercises on vowel-sounds, and a considerable difficulty in getting as satisfactory a tone when English words were used. The same difficulty was not noticeable to anything like the same extent when Italian words were used. The first explanation that occurred to me was that Italian is easier to sing than English, because it has a greater

proportion of vowels to consonants; and also because the most usual practising vowel is 'ah', and this vowel occurs a great many more times in a passage of Italian than in an English passage of the same length. But this explanation did not account for the further observation that if I began by singing two or three Italian songs at the beginning of a practice it was much easier to get a full tone in the English songs sung afterwards.

Now it is very important to keep such facts in mind at the beginning of the training of a voice, because a particular quality of tone used in exercises tends to become stereotyped. The voice-user tends to copy the kind of sound that he hears himself using most often, and during training he certainly hears the sound of his own voice much more often than the sound of any other—or even of others in the aggregate.

This psychological attitude towards the voice is very difficult to alter, and this is certainly *one* of the reasons for the undoubted fact that the vast majority of world-famous voices do not and have not come from the English-speaking races. Within certain limits, it is true that every one has a choice of qualities of voice that he can use without damage to the instrument. But it often happens that the statement made earlier about the different voices of one individual is only theoretically true, because many people get so used to hearing themselves make a particular type of sound that it becomes impossible for them to make any other: this, however, is never true of the young student with a good ear.

The principles of subconscious imitation are clearly illustrated by the well-known fact that an Englishman who spends a considerable time in the United States comes back with a good many of the speech-characteristics of the American people, and this is not only shown in his choice of words and phrases, but also in the actual quality of the voice. The American who spends some time in England repays this compliment of imitation by losing part of what is sometimes called the American twang.

In conventional training for singing there is a tendency to regard the voice chiefly as a musical instrument, and, in the early stages, to do many exercises for gaining facility and flexibility—that is to say, exercises in rapid scale and interval singing. This practice may very easily stereotype a bad tone. Beginners either use a light conversational tone—mistaking it for one of ease or naturalness, whereas English conversation usually has neither the one nor the other—or they practise with a special kind of singing tone, chosen in accordance with their ideas of aesthetic beauty in the world of sound. Such a tone, however musically beautiful it may be, is often inadequate on account of its lack of what may be called vocal or dramatic expressiveness. This by no means implies that beauty of tone from the purely musical point of view is not something to be aimed at, but it is usually not the most important object for the untrained voice—and especially the English voice—to aim for. Any habitual tone tends to become stereotyped, and for this reason it is very necessary to see that a beginner has a clear idea of the object for which he is finally training his voice, which is not only for use as a musical instrument, but also as a dramatic instrument.

The ears of some people—and, I think, most children—are very sensitive to quality of vocal sound—simply as quality without any associations with expressions of emotion. Such people are able to learn a great deal of tone-production for speaking and singing by mere listening—primarily by listening alone, but this afterwards has to be supplemented by attempts to imitate the sounds heard, because full control only comes after hearing *one's own voice* making different qualities at will. On the other hand, those whose attention is not sufficiently engaged by mere quality of sound can be made to vary their voices by an appeal to the dramatic sense. Passages of strongly contrasted mood may be chosen to be intoned on a definite note. One might take the opening words of one of Holst's works—'Savitri, Savitri, I am Death'—for one, and 'Come unto these yellow

sands' for another mood. Any one with a dramatic sense will use a noticeably fuller tone and more emphatic style for the first than for the second. By intoning one or other of these passages over and over again, he gets used to hearing his voice producing a certain kind of quality. He then comes gradually to associate this quality with certain subjective sensations in the use of the vocal organs, and so finally arrives at an independent control of that particular quality of sound.

The pupil who is unable to make some kind of difference in the treatment of these two passages is unlikely to make an interesting singer on the interpretative side, though his purely musical gifts may be good. Musical ability (in the sense of special powers in connexion with the sense of hearing) and dramatic ability by no means necessarily exist in the same individual. Even the different powers of the ear show very remarkable variations in degree in the same person. I have known a young student whose musical abilities were such that he found no difficulty in transposing some complicated song of Strauss into any key which suited him, but his sensitiveness to musical quality was so small that he always produced a throaty and constricted tone, which was very unpleasant to hear. And I have known another young singer with much slighter purely musical powers, who started his vocal career by producing the rather thin tone usually referred to as 'throaty tenor' in his baritone compass, but, by means of appeals to his ear both by quality alone and also by dramatic suggestion, he shortly produced a full and extremely beautiful baritone voice, which nature apparently, and art certainly, really meant him to have.

The difficulties of the first were partly due to a certain kind of self-consciousness, and partly to an ear insensitive to quality. It may seem curious to attribute the difficulties of a very musical person to the lack of a particular type of ear-sensitiveness. The fact remains, however, that a good many instrumentalists, especially, perhaps, pianists, either are, or tend to become,

insensitive to quality in musical tones. Their abilities are chiefly exercised in the melodic and temporal aspects of music, both of them matters of great importance in the art, but of no value whatever to a singer for curing difficulties in tone-production.

The mention of self-consciousness leads to another point of primary importance in the art of singing. A great many young students do not define for themselves at all clearly what is their object when they start to sing. This is probably due to the facts that there are different kinds of singing and also different reasons for doing any of them. But I think it will be admitted that the young student should concentrate entirely upon regarding his singing as an art, and not as a method of attracting attention to himself or of making a living. Not that attracting attention to oneself and making a living are either of them reprehensible activities, but it so happens that a man who is primarily a fine artist will succeed better in these secondary objects than those who aim for them directly—though in successful professional art there are other things that have to be taken into consideration, because a fine artist is not necessarily a good showman.

Now the main object of an artist, in whatever field he is working, is to stimulate the imagination of those people to whom his art is addressed; but at the same time it is true that in music and singing, more than in any other art, the total amount of pleasure given is largely dependent upon what may be called the beauty of the medium.

An artist may produce a fine work of art in black and white only, though neither the one nor the other can be said to possess any appreciable amount of aesthetic value—neither black nor white in themselves give any particular thrill to the sense of sight. A singer, however, will find it difficult to make a success of his art without a certain beauty of vocal tone; that is to say, a quality of sound that tends to give pleasure in itself, apart from any patterns that are woven by it. When, however, the



singer has grasped that it is his main business to interest his listeners in their own imaginings he tends to free himself from one very tiresome form of self-consciousness. The full realization in practice that this should be his main preoccupation goes a long way towards setting free the English singer or speaker from the tyranny of his conventional repressed conversational habits.

It should be noted that the word self-consciousness has come to be used in English for the state of mind that causes affected behaviour on the part of a person in the presence of others. In the literal sense, self-consciousness is a very valuable, almost essential, possession for a singer, actor, or public speaker. In this sense, it is the power that enables the possessor to get outside himself and watch his actions and general behaviour objectively. Merely subjective thoughts and feelings are no criterion of the effect that is being produced on an audience.

The unconscious imitation which tends to make any one copy the speech-habits of those with whom he has most converse shows how extremely important it is for the singer to have fine models of vocal tone constantly available. To begin with, he should miss no opportunity of hearing really good voices, but it is perhaps even more important that he should as far as possible avoid hearing himself practise with a poor tone. This can be effected at the beginning of his work by the regular practice of singing his best notes and vowels *very* much more often than his weaker ones. This does not have the effect, as might be concluded from a false analogy with other types of technique, of developing his best notes out of all proportion to the others; on the contrary, it has the effect, again by unconscious imitation, of improving these weaker notes.

Foreign teachers often seem completely ignorant of the Englishman's particular psychological difficulties in producing a full and adequate vocal tone. This is unfortunate, because a good many foreign teachers visit

this country annually or settle down here permanently. The number of English singing-teachers who succeed in establishing a practice abroad is extremely small, if indeed any exist at all. For the moment, we are not concerned with all the causes of this adverse balance of trade, but there is no doubt that popular conviction about the inferiority of our native music-makers goes back a long way. It existed even in the time that is reasonably regarded as the golden age of our song-writing history, for we find the composer Cooper writing in 1613 or thereabouts under the name of Coprario, and somewhat later the highbrows of the period were tricked by an English composer into accepting his setting of a list from an Italian catalogue as a serious importation from the 'land of song'. For those who adopt music as a profession, there is very little doubt, then or now, about the wisdom of decking out a drab English name with a few coloured continental tail-feathers.

Whatever may be the reasons, good or bad, for this apparently incurable national prejudice, it is an undoubted fact that foreign teachers flock here to teach us to sing; and we may partly repay our debt to such missionaries by teaching them how to teach us—for this is more in the nature of a psychological than an artistic or vocal problem. If the facts set forth in this chapter show a true picture of the Englishman's vocal difficulties, it follows that methods which foreign teachers adopt for their fellow countrymen are by no means always suitable for the Englishman, without considerable modification, especially in the initial stages. I say purposely English, not British, because, if the names of those British subjects who have achieved a considerable reputation as singers in the past hundred years are passed in review, it will be found, I think, that Scotland, Wales, and Ireland can claim the greater number of them.

It is probable that the English vocal instrument is not markedly inferior to the foreign article, but it is almost certain that the home product is often damaged

by unskilful treatment while it is developing. It also seems probable that, so long as our attitude towards our conversational methods remains the same, we are not likely to produce as many great singers as are produced by other nations that are not shy of conversational loudness and the free expression of the emotions.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SPOKEN ENGLISH

THE sung word necessarily differs from the spoken one in several ways. The relative durations of the syllables are usually altered considerably; the pitch remains steady and then is changed by sudden definite steps, instead of being continually fluctuating; and the formal rhythm of the music tends to induce a different balance and emphasis of the words.

In addition to this, there is, in English, a more subtle matter to be considered, something that makes the recognition of words very difficult in songs where the time is slow and the melody sustained. As an illustration, we may take the vowel-sounds of the words *go* and *gate*. The foreigner almost always assumes that the *o* and the *a* represent single vowel-sounds, but the English ear does not recognize them as correctly pronounced unless the *o* finishes off with the vowel sound of *look*, and the *a* with that of *it*. The rapid recognition of such dual sounds depends not only upon the quality of the two parts but also upon their relative duration. This relative duration is altered when syllables containing such sounds are sung—except on the comparatively rare occasions when the words follow one another at conversational speed—because the note has to be sustained for a disproportionate time on one or other of the sounds. (This can be tested by singing a long note on the words *time* and *tune*.) It will be found incidentally that ‘*tune*’, where the second sound is sustained, is easier to recognize than ‘*time*’, where it is the first.

But whatever may be the difficulties, either from musical presentation in general or from the peculiarities of a particular language, the singer must *suggest* natural unaffected speech, and for this reason he must have very clear notions in his own mind as to what this is in ordinary conversation.

There is really only one possible way of trying to arrive at a definition of 'correct speech'. This is by considering what is the precise object of speaking. Putting aside cynical references to people who talk for the sake of talking, we see that the matter is plain enough. Speech is used by one person with the object of arousing ideas in other people. If the organs of speech are used in *any* way that hinders this object, that is obviously a fault in speaking.

It has already been pointed out, in the chapter upon 'Meaning in Speech and Song', that spoken words are apt to convey more meanings than written words—and still more than printed ones. If a man writes an article which you read in a printed journal, you may know what his opinions are—or at least what he wants you to think they are. If he says the same things in a speech, or by the medium of the wireless, you may know in addition whether he has learnt to speak in the north or the south of this country, and this may affect your attitude towards his expressed opinions.

If we follow out this idea a little further, we find that we are driven to the conclusion that speech which is correct in one place or on one occasion is incorrect in another place or occasion, and that there is indeed no absolute standard of correct speech. One can only say that correct speech on any occasion is that which performs adequately something which is, at its simplest, a dual function. Schools of speech that are led away, by the fascination of making rules, from the contemplation of the fundamental objects of the use of the spoken word are always liable to inculcate tiresome affectations—the Church and the Theatre are examples. You may have been taught to say 'hwich' and 'hwen' for their more ordinarily pronounced equivalents, but if you do it when trying to convert an unaffected working man to your political opinions you may easily find yourself classified as an affected ass instead of the honest muscular Christian you suppose yourself to be. Well, you can, of course, if you like, sacrifice your logic on the altar of your

pronunciation principles—many people have done it before—but it will be difficult for you to defend yourself against the accusation that you have forgotten that you were trying to use the spoken word to convince your hearer.

There seems to be an inveterate tendency on the part of our Scottish, Welsh, and Irish neighbours to try to teach us to speak our own language. A pamphlet was published by the B.B.C. in 1928. It embodied the findings of a committee appointed to make 'recommendations to announcers regarding certain words of doubtful pronunciation'. It contains, besides its list of words and their recommended pronunciation, an admirable discussion of the question of pronunciation in general.

One of the most interesting things is, however, the constitution of the committee. The Chairman was the poet laureate at that time, Robert Bridges, and the members were Sir Johnstone Forbes-Robertson, Professor Daniel Jones, Mr. A. Lloyd James, Mr. George Bernard Shaw, and Mr. Logan Pearsall Smith. Some people may feel a vague dissatisfaction while reading the 'names' of this committee, but the report itself is so balanced and reasonable that they will wonder whether there is the smallest ground for any complaint. The solution seems to be that we should in this matter take a hint from national nomenclature, and that the B.B.C. should seek for something that may be called British Standard Speech and not English Standard. The Englishman may then be left in peace to talk this standard with an English accent if he so desires. If it were customary to regard the speech of an 'educated' Englishman as a mere variety of British standard, this might do something to ease the irritation that our neighbours sometimes feel on hearing it.

The extent to which this irritation can go is shown in a remarkable way by a book published a few years ago in Kegan Paul's 'To-day and To-morrow' series. The author of this book—*Breaking Priscian's Head, or Eng-*

*lish as She will be Spoke and Wrote*—tells us that he is a Scotsman born abroad, and on p. 68 confesses with regret that his ear is a poor one. This seems a curious qualification for a speech-reformer, but he wisely resigns the practical part of the reform to a body of educated Dublin Irish, suggesting that they should be subsidized by the English to teach English speaking to English people. Irish Standard, as spoken by the educated classes in Dublin, is said to be 'as pure and harmonious a form of English as the heart of man could desire'.

Statements of such a kind from an individual must proceed primarily from information received by his ear, and secondarily from his idea of beauty. Now, discussions between people who are not agreed as to the exact meaning of the terms which they employ are liable to be neither instructive to the participators nor edifying to those looking on, so it seems worth while to examine the meaning of the terms 'beautiful' and 'ugly' as applied to the spoken word, for this at least should prevent useless argument between people who cannot possibly agree.

The feelings of pleasure and approbation which sometimes arise when contemplating an object are commonly spoken of as being caused by the beauty of that object, but it does not require a very strenuous course of Berkeley to convince any one that the beauty is in the mind of the beholder, and that it is dependent upon a whole host of associations of a very complicated kind. If the object of attention is a sound, we find that one sound may differ from another in pitch, intensity, and complexity. Our judgement of the pleasantness, or the reverse, of any particular sound depends upon these factors. That is to say, one may dislike some isolated vocal sound because it seems to us too shrill, too loud, or too harsh.

The factors which condition our attitude towards the spoken word are, however, considerably more complicated, and in listening to the speech of any individual

this attitude is dependent mainly upon the following attributes:

1. *The quality of the sound.* A very complicated matter in itself, where what may be called the musical quality of the individual voice is perhaps the most important thing.

2. *Variety or monotony of intonation.* That is to say, change or evenness of pitch. Associated closely with this is the use of emphasis, either dynamically or by what may be called suspense. On these things depend very largely the ease with which a speaker expresses his feelings and also delicate shades of meaning.

3. *Preciseness of articulation and adequate loudness.* Without these, speech fatigues the attention of the hearer, but both of them, especially the former, are liable to be very irritating if they are overdone—that is to say, more than adequate for the purpose in hand on any particular occasion.

The overdoing of the virtue of precise articulation is often due to a misplaced devotion to the visual signs (i.e. spelling) for archaic speech fashions: but spelling is no longer the faithful servant of speech, and the phoneticians have had to engage a new one.

Closely associated with (2) is

4. *Speed—and its variations*—at which syllables and words follow one another. Few people manage to escape from the tyranny of the visual sense when reading aloud. The regular spacing of the printed or written words induces a regularity of speed in their spoken equivalents. One comma is like another, to the eye and to the grammarian: the 'spoken' comma varies considerably in duration. And the speed of a parenthesis should usually be markedly faster than that of the main sentence in which it occurs.

Since all these things may vary considerably in different people whom no one would accuse of speaking incorrectly, it remains to be seen what are the characteristics associated with the phrase 'speaking with an accent'. This consists primarily in certain variations of



vowel-pronunciation, and these are usually associated with easily noticed omissions (initial *h*'s and final *g*'s, for example) or additions, and also with obvious variations in the emphasis put on syllables and changes in the 'melodic' shape of phrases. The ear, even of so-called unmusical people, is, however, so extremely sensitive to slight changes in the dialect one has heard around one in childhood and adolescence that it is useless to attempt any detailed description of these.

Recent research has given an explanation of the obvious fact—puzzling to those who know a little about the acoustical side of the matter—that a vowel-sound preserves its recognizable identity although spoken by voices of very different quality and general pitch. Put in the shortest way possible, the explanation is this:

A spoken or sung vowel is a complicated sound made up of numerous simple sounds called 'partials'. The characteristic which we call 'quality of sound' depends upon the number and relative intensity of all these partials. But the recognition of a vowel depends upon the predominant intensity of partials in certain restricted regions of the scale; these regions are usually, if not always, two in number for each vowel: and each vowel naturally has its own specific regions.

Thus, when a particular vowel is sounded, the particular partials which give its specific recognizable character stand out in intensity above the numerous other partials always to be found in vocal sounds. So long as this predominance is not interfered with, the other partials may vary in number and intensity, and so change the general quality of the sound while the vowel remains the same.

But as quality in general depends upon the number and relative intensity of partials in a complex sound, it follows that vowels themselves are particular qualities of sound to which we assign an identity by long practice and association. By most of us, this analytical power of the ear (i.e. the separation of the vowel-quality from the general quality) is exercised quite automatically without

any attention to detail, but an ear which is naturally good in this respect may be trained so that it can assign a definite pitch to the partials which stand out clearly in well sung vowels.

Another fact that is worth noting is that vowels tend to become 'neutralized' as far as beauty or specific suggestion is concerned. This is owing to the frequent use of the same vowels in words of diverse or contrasted meanings. Such words as 'gloomy' and 'blooming', 'wild' and 'mild', will illustrate clearly what is meant by this.

By this time, the difficulty of arranging dialectical varieties of speech in order of aesthetic merit will need no further demonstration. But as the majority of people hold very strong opinions upon beauty and 'correctness' in speech, we shall have to seek for an explanation elsewhere than in the realms of pure acoustics and aesthetics.

A simple illustration will show the nature of the feelings upon which such opinions are based. A southern Englishman who hears the word 'come' pronounced as 'koom', instead of the 'kum' to which he is accustomed, is often not content to say that this is an unusual pronunciation to him. He is likely to call it incorrect and ugly. These two epithets cannot be defended by any process of reasoning. It has already been pointed out that there is no absolute criterion of correctness in speech except that depending upon adequacy of function; and it certainly is not clear how any one would set about the problem of proving that the vowel-sound of the word 'look' is uglier than that in 'fun'. He is forced to the conclusion that such a pronunciation is displeasing to him because he is not accustomed to hearing his relatives, friends, and 'tribe' in general pronouncing it in that way. It is the sign of a different class—the sign of a stranger or 'foreigner'.

There are certain little tricks of pronunciation and diction for which one has a marked liking or dislike which is only to be accounted for by unconscious association with some loved or hated companion of early

years. These in the aggregate become the speech-signs whereby we recognize our nation, tribe, or class; or their opposites. And finally the signs of something that we like or dislike come to be regarded as beautiful or ugly in themselves.

We need not as a rule, then, take much notice when we hear epithets such as 'pure' and 'harmonious' applied to dialects by individuals; such statements will tell us something about the individual, but not much about the dialect.

One of the chief acoustical characteristics of a whole language depends upon the proportion of consonants to vowels. German, which is rather guttural, hissing, and explosive to speak, becomes pleasant in singing, where the duration of the vowels is lengthened, and also because of the large proportion of *m*'s, *n*'s, and *l*'s which have a very definite musical value when properly used. Italian, on account of the preponderance of its vowels, is musical and 'liquid' in speech but has a tendency to become slightly indefinite, from one vocal point of view, in song. But in a given language such as English this proportion is not altered by Irish, Scottish, or native treatment, so that we are driven to judge the comparative 'beauty' of these treatments almost entirely by the beauty of the voices which use them.

The author spoken of earlier mentions the pleasantness of George Bernard Shaw's speech. Most people would agree with this. But then he has a pleasant voice; it is a family characteristic. His sister had a beautiful voice and was a very charming singer, as those whose memories go back to the light opera *Dorothy* will agree. His mother had the same pleasing quality of voice, and so had her half-sisters. Indeed, my experience not only of the Shaw family in particular but of the Irish in general leads me to expect that they will have charming voices which I shall have ample opportunity of admiring. Their mispronunciation of my dialect does not worry me, even when they tell me, as they often do, that it is better than my own.

However, the Blarney Stone does not always resolutely turn its face from these shores, for in the *Sunday Times* of August 19th, 1928, the late Mr. T. P. O'Connor wrote as follows:

My first weeks in London were made a little more difficult by my inability to understand half of what the English people around me said. I still remember the bright little chambermaid who puzzled me every morning by telling me she had brought the 'piper' . . . Gradually I got accustomed to the Cockney accent, and, as a matter of fact, I can still recall the days when, alone and friendless, I wandered through the streets of London, listening with delight to an accent then so strange to me. Instead of being repelled by it, as I sometimes am now, I was delighted with it, and thought it quite melodious.

The simple-minded student seeking to make his English speech as pleasant as possible may well be puzzled when he is told that Cockney is melodious and that Irish is harmonious. However, by considering that, even were it possible, it is not the primary object of speech to be melodious and harmonious, he will be saved making a heroic attempt to talk Cockney with an Irish brogue.

The invention of broadcasting has called attention to the convenience of having some standard of English pronunciation for announcers which is acceptable to the many millions of listeners. Up to the present, this announcing has been done chiefly in a dialect which those who try to classify modern fashions of speaking call Public School Standard. In the book already referred to, *Breaking Priscian's Head*, this is described as the slovenliest of all English dialects. But slovenliness consists much more in the manner of speaking a dialect than in the nature of the dialect itself—a beautiful woman may be slovenly and a homely one clean and neat. Among the many criticisms that have been and can be levelled against the B.B.C., that of slovenly speech on the part of announcers is probably the least justifiable, and there is at least the danger of over-preciseness of articulation when dealing with common-

place subjects, for, as every one will recognize, this is the hall-mark of pomposity.

When any one suggests that speakers from Ireland or Inverness should be employed to teach the English to talk their own language, he loses sight of the fact that beauty of speech is largely beauty of voice, which cannot be grafted to any great extent.

There are obviously those who think that when the Public School Standard is clearly articulated by some one with a beautiful voice, especially when he does not self-consciously think it is 'side' to use those modulations and intonations which come from a sincere expression of feeling, it is so little inferior to its Irish or Inverness rivals that it may be left to work out its own salvation unaided by any kindly meant missionary work from our neighbours.

At the present time the public schools and the older English universities seem to be doing very little to maintain the prestige which they seem to have acquired in this and other matters of a like kind. No one will maintain that the public schools are noted for making their pupils either write clearly or speak distinctly, and the throaty drawl in which many young persons carry on their conversation expresses very little except a sense of their own importance. It is possible that, if in this and other matters the public schools do not try for themselves to put their house in order, a future Labour government will try to do it for them; a complicated piece of machinery is always a temptation to the mechanically minded amateur who does not know how it has been made.

Meanwhile, any speech which is (1) clearly enunciated, so that it does not fatigue the attention of the listener; (2) well-modulated in quality, emphasis, melody and speed, so that it can convey feeling and delicate shades of meaning; and (3) free from irritating tricks and mannerisms likely to arouse the prejudices of any listener—a fairly formidable list of virtues indeed—is the kind of 'correct' English speech for which every one

should strive. Beauty may be left to look after itself, as it usually does in all forms of expression that are sincere.

With these considerations in mind, the individual singer must decide exactly how he wishes to speak and then practice 'declaiming' the words of his songs—and passages of prose and poetry—without any aid or hindrance from music. There is little doubt that most singers do not regard this as a necessary part of their daily practice. This is a mistake from every point of view. It is obviously difficult to attend to the verbal part of voice-using when so much of the attention has to be given to music and tone-production during singing; so that even the best speaker is liable to 'speak' less well while singing.

Reasons have already been given for the undoubted fact that English is more difficult than Italian or German to make intelligible in song. These are difficulties inherent in the sounds and syllables themselves. But the success of making the words of a song understood by the audience is dependent upon other things than the mere accurate and clear enunciation of syllables. It depends also upon attention to that balance and emphasis of words and phrases that makes ordinary speech carry the maximum of interest and meaning. If the singer cannot say the words in this way he is unlikely to sing them in a way that will make them intelligible.

## CHAPTER IX

### MUSIC WITHOUT LETTERS

IN the preface to Mr. Dolmetsch's charming collection of old English songs<sup>1</sup> there is an exhortation to the English singers of this generation on the subject of words. Mr. Dolmetsch writes: 'The words, always beautiful, sometimes perfect examples of what songs should be, ought to be foremost in the performer's mind. They should be clearly pronounced and intelligently spoken. This being done will greatly help to discover the right style of the music, which is, mostly, only an illustration of the words.' If there be any who do not cordially agree with this neatly expressed estimate of the relative importance of the sphere-born harmonious sisters—in songs of this kind—I am certainly not of the number, so I have thought it legitimate, beginning with this particular collection, to consider the attitude of song-editors in general towards the corresponding part of their duties.

In greatness of musical achievement, no one would, I think, deny the pre-eminence of Germany. Since music is an international language, one has a right to an opinion on the comparative merits of countries in this matter. If, however, any one says that he thinks England is pre-eminent in poetry, it is easy to see that there are factors that may invalidate his judgement. None the less, such is my opinion, and it seems a pity that song-editors and proof-readers are not more careful in their treatment of our heritage of lyric poetry. For the moment, however, I prefer to confine myself to a statement of the difficulties that beset a singer whose attention is largely occupied with the words. Supposing that he decides to sing 'As I walked forth', the second song in Mr. Dolmetsch's collection, he finds that his ear

<sup>1</sup> *Select English Songs and Dialogues of the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Boosey).

expects rhyming couplets, but what he gets is 'espièd' (according to the musical pointing) 'rhyming' with 'side', 'scent' with 'bents', and, in verses 2 and 3, 'she' with 'I'. It is difficult to suppose that the original writer of the verses treated his rhymes with such scant respect. I admit that 'deep expression' and 'perfect simplicity', more especially the latter, are of importance in treating these words; but may we not have rhyme too? It seems comparatively simple to add an 's' to 'scent' and to substitute 'still did cry' for 'still cri'd she', but it is not perfectly simple to see why one must say 'espièd' (especially when the 'ed' is arranged to come on a strong beat) but is not allowed to say 'crièd' where the 'ed' (according to the non-rhyming editing) comes quite nicely on a semi-quaver.

The sixth song, 'Amidst the Mirtles' ('Among the Mirtles', as I know the title), is full of variations of the words as they usually appear in editions of Herrick's works; and almost all the variations are weaker, as any one may see by comparing this edition with the ordinary printed version. But worse awaits us in the ninth song, which is a setting of Herrick's 'Gather ye rose-buds while ye may', as all the editions that I know have it, but 'Gather your Rosebuds while you may' in this, taken, as the preface states, from Playford's *Ayres*, first edition. After several unimportant verbal variations, 'that' for 'this', 'must' for 'will', 'that' for 'which', and 'while' for 'when', we find the third verse printed thus:

That age is best that is the first  
While youth and blood are warmer,  
Expect not the last and worst,  
Time still succeeds the former.

How are such words to be 'intelligently spoken'? In all the editions of Herrick's poems that I know the words are given thus:

That Age is best, which is the first,  
When Youth and Blood are warmer;  
But being spent, the worse and worst  
Times still succeed the former.



which, being easily intelligible, is probably what Herrick wrote.

Incidentally—I speak as a singer—why are the words of Handel’s ‘Where’er you walk’ almost invariably attributed to Congreve? The words certainly exist in Pope’s second Pastoral. Did Pope borrow them from the libretto of *Semele*? Or is it that song-editors do not read Pope but do read Congreve—by accident?

The words of Ben Jonson’s ‘Drink to me only . . .’ are always tempted from their course by the siren voice of music. There does not seem to be any authority for variations from the following:

Drink to me only with thine eyes  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss but in the cup  
And I’ll not look for wine.

The thirst that from the soul doth rise  
Doth ask a drink divine;  
But might I of Jove’s nectar sup,  
I would not change for thine.

We get ‘within’ for ‘but in’, ‘ask’ for ‘look’, and, most remarkable of all, ‘sip’ for ‘sup’—sometimes all three mistakes in the same version.

Burns, Byron, Scott, and Shakespeare have all attracted the attention of foreign composers. Most of these settings have been made for the translated version of the words in the composer’s language. Under these circumstances, the original English words never fit exactly with the musical phrasing, so that when the song is sung in English it is necessary to make small changes either in the words or in the music. The music can, as a rule, give way much more gracefully than the words, but some editors are so little in agreement with this that they will change them even though they fit the music exactly. What particular mental aberration is it that makes some one change Burns’s

Go fetch to me a pint o’ wine  
And fill it in a silver tassie;

to

Go fetch a flask of sparkling wine  
And fill it in a crystal glassie,

or, worse still, a particularly powerful line like

The glittering spears are rankèd ready;

to

Each patriot heart beats high for glory;

The German translator himself knew better, for he wrote

Sieht glänzen man die blanken Speere;

And when we find that Franz's music goes so well to the original words that, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, one might well suppose that it was these that were set and not the German version, what are we to think of the impertinence that writes 'Robert Burns' at the head of this invertebrate doggerel? Is there no Burns Society to protest against such sacrilege, or do not Scotsmen sing Franz? If not, it is a pity, because this is a very good song—it has a melody, it has a lilt which carries the original words with admirable precision and balance, and also a nice adjustment of musical phrase to the changes of mood—from descriptive to contemplative—at the end of each verse. In this song of Robert Franz's, one can change from the German version to the original words at the expense of the suppression of a single reiterated semiquaver, but a song such as Schubert's 'Who is Silvia?' requires more adjustment if due respect is to be paid to Shakespeare's words. Here again we may note the extraordinary aberration that has caused people in popular editions of this song to change Shakespeare's

'That she might admirèd be'.

to

'That adorèd she might be'.

and to invert

'Love doth to her eyes repair'

so that it réads

'To her eyes doth love repair',

a singularly inane piece of meddling, since here (though not throughout the song) the main accents of the sentence fit the music very well.

The best way to consider the conflicting claims of the musical and verbal phrasing in this song will be to write out the vocal line which is the same for the three verses, and also the words in full. The words, as every one knows—or does not know—are:

Who is Silvia? what is she?  
 That all our swains commend her?  
 Holy, fair, and wise is she;  
 The heavens such grace did lend her,  
 That she might admirèd be.  
 Is she kind as she is fair?  
 For beauty lives with kindness:  
 Love doth to her eyes repair,  
 To help him of his blindness;  
 And, being help'd, inhabits there.  
 Then to Silvia let us sing,  
 That Silvia is excellèd;  
 She excels each mortal thing  
 Upon the dull earth dwelling;  
 To her let us garlands bring.

An examination of the words alone shows a difficulty inherent in all 'strophic' songs, where the same melody does duty several times for different words. Did Schubert think that you could sing 'Holy, fair, and wise is she' (with what I should call a half-comma after 'fair') to the same musical phrasing as that used for 'Love doth to her eyes repair'? I think not. And I for one shall not stultify him by trying to do it. If, therefore, Shakespeare's words are made the first consideration, the music must vary like this:

Verse 1. 

„ 2. 



many things that claim attention during the course of a song that one of the prime duties of the singer is to reduce the intellectual effort of the listener to a minimum by using every possible aid to the understanding of the words. It is often easy to extract the meaning from an inverted sentence with the eye while reading, and almost always difficult to do so with the ear when listening. The ear is only given one chance before the voice passes on to engage the attention with something else.

There are those who confess—or even boast, as if it were something to be proud of—that they do not listen to the words of a song. The question therefore arises as to what use it is for the really able singer to cast the pearls of his articulation (of words) and diction (in the French sense of presentation of sentences) before such listeners. At first sight, it seems a waste of time to sing to people in a language—their own or another—which they do not understand. The answer is that the music, *as music alone*, gains in interest and vitality when the articulation and diction of the words are good. Without probing very deeply into the reasons for this, it is easy to see that, in strophic songs at least—where different words have to be sung to the same melody—the intelligent presentation of the sentences involves variations in the phrasing and accent that greatly relieve monotony—‘Whò is Silvia’, but ‘Is she kìnd’, for instance.

But to return to the question of Shakespeare and Schubert—it may be asked, What right one has to edit or alter Schubert’s music? Well, to begin with, at least as much right as any one has to alter Shakespeare’s words—either the order or the flow. But such a question may be looked at in another way. It may be taken as an illustration of a very common attitude towards foreign art and artists. Here we have something that is the joint product of Germany’s greatest song-writer and England’s greatest poet. So our poet must be expected to give way courteously to the foreign visitor. And at this nice point of international etiquette we may leave the matter.

## CHAPTER X

### THE SINGER'S EAR

**I**N a mid-Victorian poem whose main theme is the tiresome self-pity of a jilted youth—'a trampled orphan', as he calls himself—it is curious to find a remarkable prophecy of aerial warfare, several lines which are known and quoted wherever English is spoken, and also a concise summary of the history of almost all branches of human endeavour. 'Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers' accurately reviews the history of singing and its teaching. Wisdom is the power to use knowledge aright; from which it follows that a man may know a great deal and yet be very unwise.

It is only within comparatively recent times, since the invention of the laryngoscope by Garcia, that the main points of the mechanism of the voice have been clearly understood. The use of the laryngoscope brought to light a number of definite facts about the action of the vocal cords, and the additional use of stroboscopic methods of examining the movements of vibrating bodies made it possible to follow the action of this part of the vocal mechanism in considerable detail.

Unfortunately, at about the same time, singers and their teachers discovered the diaphragm. It had, it is true, been known to the anatomists before, but it remained for the vocalists to discover the wonderful things it could do. They decided that it could, among other things, 'support the voice' and 'colour the tone' as occasion required, while the rectus abdominis, its near neighbour and colleague in the complicated act of breathing, got no credit for its contractions. Part of these magical powers, I feel sure, were the outcome of its picturesque name: the 'phr' and the 'gm' especially being redolent of mystery.

In the excitement of this discovery, complicated systems of 'voice-production' were devised, most of

them unnatural and unnecessary, and some of them positively injurious; so it is not to be wondered at that no one seemed really satisfied that the teaching of singing had taken any remarkable stride forward. Those who were convinced that nothing of the kind had taken place sometimes proceeded to try and prove it in the most unfair way possible, by comparing the phenomenal singers of one, or several generations, with the rank and file of modern times.

But it is not necessary to institute historical comparisons in order to show that there are two styles of singing, the good and the bad; and it is not possible to know how much of the second style past audiences had to endure. We do know, however, that we in our day have to listen to a good deal of it. How many modern singers do we hear who sing absolutely in tune, who take their intervals cleanly and accurately, whose voices are beautiful in tone and flexible in use, and whose diction<sup>1</sup> is clear and unaffected? This may seem to be an exacting list of virtues, but not many people would bother to hear a violinist a second time unless he had all of them except the last.

So the question arises whether we get anything from the modern singer to make up for deficiencies in one or more of these respects. The answer is that we often get singing that is rich in dramatic suggestion, and singers with a strong sense of rhythm who are very skilful in their presentation of words.

Now, the intelligent and dramatic presentation of words is not primarily a musical feat at all, nor can rhythm be claimed as an especial prerogative of music as the term music is usually understood; and most people will probably agree with the statement that a good deal of very interesting singing that we listen to nowadays is rather poor on the musical side. For instance, I have lately heard two excellent singers—excellent because of

<sup>1</sup> The word 'diction' is here used in the French sense of 'manner of declamation', 'the way in which words and sentences are spoken'—not in the restricted English sense of 'choice of words'.

the artistic pleasure they give—neither of whom was able to sing the *music* of the first song in Schubert's 'Schöne Müllerin' cycle:



Das	Wan - dern	ist	des	Mül - lers	Lust
Vom	Was - ser	ha - ben	wir's	ge - lernt	
Das	seh'n	wir	auch	den	Rä - dern
Die	Stei - ne	selbst	so	schwer	sie sind

It is very difficult to sing the semiquaver arpeggio passage in the first phrase accurately and smoothly to the awkward German words in the first four verses, but it certainly should not be beyond the powers of a first-class singer. Some singers adopt an aspirated staccato method for getting clean intonation in such passages, but there is no ground for supposing that if Schubert had wanted it sung staccato he would not have said so.

Failures of this kind are chiefly due to the fact that so very few singers really know what the passage sounds like when correctly done. If the singer has a fine natural ear, which has only been neglected, it will be a revelation to him to hear the passage played on a fiddle, or, better still, on a clarinet.

The neglect of this kind of ear-training has been responsible for many defects in modern singing. Interest has been concentrated upon the anatomical, mechanical, and acoustical facts about the voice—especially by those whose understanding of these matters was not at all profound—so that, as regards both breathing and tone-production, there has been a tendency to substitute a sophisticated conscious control, based on insufficient knowledge, for the more natural control by the ear. It is as true of the voice as it is of any other bodily mechanism, that the most detailed knowledge of it can never be used any further than to ensure that Nature does her work under the most favourable conditions. In this connexion, the following quotation from Darwin's *Expression of the Emotions in Men and Animals* is very much to the point:



The conscious wish to perform a reflex action sometimes stops or interrupts its performance, though the proper sensory nerves may be stimulated. For instance, many years ago I laid a small wager with a dozen young men that they would not sneeze if they took snuff, although they all declared that they invariably did so; accordingly they all took a pinch, but from wishing much to succeed, not one sneezed, though their eyes watered, and all, without exception, had to pay me the wager.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, no amount of knowledge about the complicated muscular movements which are needed for a sneeze can produce the effect that a slight tickling in the nose or cooling of the skin brings about so successfully; and further, conscious attention to the physical sensations which accompany the sneeze, so far from helping it, actually prevents it happening.

The art of singing is dependent on a whole series of muscular mechanisms similar to those that produce a sneeze, and is controlled to a great extent, but not entirely, in similar ways. It is the business of the singer and his teacher to find the appropriate stimuli to bring these various singing-mechanisms into action.

The act of breathing has been a particularly attractive one for the theorist and faddist to interfere with, because, although it goes on automatically during, for instance, the unconsciousness produced by concussion, or during sleep, its rate and balance and extent can also be controlled consciously; and at one time or another the most fantastic, uncomfortable, and even injurious interferences with nature have been advocated and practised.

It is not easy for a member of this wicked and sophisticated generation to find out exactly how nature does intend one to take a deep breath. The only thing that it seems possible to suggest within the limits of a short chapter is that one should procure a healthy savage, make him run till he is out of breath, and then watch

<sup>1</sup> The remainder of the paragraph is also of interest: 'Sir H. Holland remarks that attention paid to the act of swallowing interferes with the proper movements, from which it probably follows, at least in part, that some people find it so difficult to swallow a pill.'

other instruments cannot compete, namely, variation of quality and the articulation of words. This in itself is reasonable enough; but since composers have had the good sense to give up writing for the voice passages which can be done much better on another instrument, it is a pity that singers have not been trained to sing these simpler melodies as well as the voice can do them. The fault here is by no means only insufficient practice at scales, arpeggios, and intervals in general. It is plain that very exact adjustments of the muscles of the larynx are necessary for the production of notes of definite musical pitch, and it is equally plain that these adjustments are entirely under the control of the auditory centres of the brain. From this it follows that, in order to sing an interval correctly, the singer must have a very exact idea of the sound of that interval. It has never been recognized that part of a singer's training should consist in listening to the melodies of his songs played on an instrument other than the voice, preferably on a keyed instrument, where precision of interval-taking is guaranteed.

There has been a tendency to look down upon people who learn things by 'ear'. It would take too long to discuss the rights and wrongs of this attitude, but it has had the unfortunate consequence of making good 'readers' think they know things that they do not really know; that is to say, they do not sing a fourth when a fifth is written, but the fifth they do sing is often not one of which an accurate ear would be proud.

The voice has to find a practical solution to problems more complex than those set to other instruments, for it has to be at the same time both a musical instrument and also an organ of speech. This dual nature of singing tends to confuse the ear, and is almost certainly the main reason why so many singers do not know what the melodies of their songs sound like when the intervals are cleanly and accurately done. The success which the singer makes of his intervals depends primarily upon what may be called his auditory ideals. The sound of

his own singing, during practice and performance, tends to confirm him in his inaccuracies, and the number of other singers it is safe for him to use as models is very small. Thus it becomes very necessary for him to listen to those instruments which have no natural disabilities in this respect.

If we now pass on to the special powers of the vocal instrument, we find evidences of the same neglect. It is obvious that a child learns to say all the vowel-sounds of its mother tongue with no instruction other than that which it gets from auditory impressions. In the same way, any one with a good 'ear'—and those without it are obviously wasting their time at singing—may learn to pronounce foreign vowels with great accuracy when childhood is long past. As the different vowels are due to variations in the positions of the lips, tongue, and soft palate, it is plain that the muscles of these organs are also under the control of the auditory centres; although, like the muscles concerned in the act of breathing, each of them may also be moved in response to visual or muscular 'memories'.

From this it follows that the voice of the individual has a considerable power, within the limits of its own constant characteristics, of copying the sound of the voice of another. In fact, what has just been said is no more than calling attention to the details of something which no one denies—the power of mimicry which the human voice possesses.

The student of singing should take every possible opportunity of hearing all those singers who have fine, well-balanced voices, so that there may be formed in his mind a clear ideal of beautiful vocal tone; for the possession of this auditory ideal is one of the essentials for the steady improvement in the quality of his own voice. Sir Henry Wood has recently pointed out how few singers thought it worth while to hear Battistini when he was last in England. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that a student with a really first-class ear-memory would need very little instruction in tone-production

other than that which he could get from constantly listening to a singer such as Battistini.

Teachers who have not fine voices themselves should at least make certain that their pupils often hear singers that have; even though the artistic merits of the singing be poor, for it should not be beyond the powers of a discriminating pupil to emulate one singer's voice and another's singing—e.g. the tone and power of a Caruso, and the dignity and restraint of a Gerhardt.

The condition of the art of singing at the present time indicates that there is need for a much greater attention to the ear as an organ of control of the vocal mechanism: first, a cultivation of its power of distinguishing, not only pitch-changes, but also varieties of quality, especially vocal quality; and afterwards, its associated power of reproducing or embellishing these sounds by giving the right instructions to the muscles of breathing, phonation, and diction.

In an age when the imperative mood stares at us from every advertisement hoarding, telling us to go there, do this, eat that—or more of it—the singer can hardly be offended if he is advised to put up a text in his room reminding him of his most important duties: 'Listen and Remember!'

## *Preliminary Note to Complexity of Singing*

Il démontrait assez bien qu'en dernière analyse c'est la baïonnette qui gagne les batailles. D'autres ont prouvé avant lui que seules la grenade, l'artillerie lourde, ou même la cavalerie peuvent décider de la victoire.

ANDRÉ MAUROIS, *Les Discours du Docteur O'Grady*.

ONE teacher says it is all a question of the nose, another that it is all a question of the diaphragm, and a third perhaps that it is all a question of the balance between the diaphragm and the uvula, that is of importance in tone-production.

As they stand, such generalizations are nonsense. They can, however, be translated from their obscurity of language into things that have a definite meaning, and they then fail in being only a very small part of the truth. From the complex mechanism each teacher chooses that part which appeals most to his imagination—or his ignorance.

No violin teacher says it is all a question of the bow, or all a question of the fingers of the left hand, or that real success is only gained by a proper balance between the chin and the wrist. The technique of the fiddle is comparatively so obvious that he would be found out at once. The fiddle reaches the hands of its player with a resonator of fixed size, and strings which, to all intents and purposes, are fixed in length, cross-section, and composition. In the singing-instrument the resonators are changing in size and shape all the time, and also the vibrating part has the power of altering its action in several complicated ways, partly on its own account and partly as a result of the resonator changes. These changes (with the exception of some of the resonator alterations) are very complicated, and are also invisible, and so it comes about that every ignorant theorist is safe from immediate exposure.

For those, however, who must have a simple verbal generalization, the nearest one to the whole truth is: 'It is all a question of the ear.'

## CHAPTER XI

### THE COMPLEXITY OF SINGING

THE simplest act of speech involves the co-ordination of three very complicated sets of muscles: those of inspiration and expiration; those of phonation (the intra- and extra-laryngeal muscles); and those of articulation (the muscles of the jaw, soft palate, tongue, and lips). Singing does not require the action of any muscles in addition to these, though it does necessitate the more delicate control of most of them. The anatomist and physiologist, therefore, will probably want a good deal of persuasion before they are likely to admit that the act of singing is a simple one.

But here some one may say—and it is a remark very much to the point—that there has to be a very exact co-ordination of complicated, electrical, magnetic, mechanical, and chemical actions before a modern motor-car can be induced to leave its garage, and yet, since in any of our walks abroad we may see a vast number of people, not exceptionally wise or skilful, controlling this complicated mechanism in a way that is good enough for most practical purposes, it is justifiable to say that the driving of a car is a simple matter. Well, there is a great deal in this simile—probably rather more than our imaginary objector supposed. For if we consider the matter a little farther we find that the ‘simplicity’ of motor-driving involves us all in a very large variety of accidents and catastrophes.

Let us examine the voice-mechanism more closely. As far as crying and inarticulate sounds are concerned, the co-ordination of sets 1 and 2 (breathing and laryngeal muscles) is instinctive; that is to say, they function efficiently without any previous instruction or practice. The first thing that a new-born child does definitely on its own account is to draw a deep breath into its lungs, and a part of this breath is almost immediately expelled in the act of uttering its first cry.

The co-ordination of these two sets of muscles with the third set—those of articulation—is learnt by imitation during early childhood. Not only this, but also the singing of simple melodies may be done without the conscious contraction or control of any of the very numerous muscles concerned. Children with good discriminating ‘ears’ can, and some children do, become good singers without any training other than the ear-training which is the result of hearing good models.

These facts, most of which are obvious and even well known, are possibly the only ones taken into consideration by those who maintain that the voice should not be specially ‘trained’, though it is to be supposed that even they do not object to exercises for the voice.

But sooner or later a serpent enters this subconscious Eden; and those who called the larynx ‘Adam’s apple’ were really indulging in a very pretty metaphor, because the directing of a singer’s attention to his throat immediately destroys any simplicity his voice-using may have had before. It tempts him to take the control out of Nature’s hands. This is always a mistake, and it is sometimes a disastrous mistake.

Nature says to the child, ‘Listen to a sound and think about it, and I will produce it for you’. So the question naturally arises why this is not good enough for the adult. What is it that makes people desire to substitute a conscious control, based upon feelings of muscular tension in the throat and elsewhere, for a control that should be left entirely to the ‘ear’? The answer is that it comes from the process of sophistication that is inevitable during the education of every normal human being in a civilized community.

The difficulties introduced in this way are the real justification for the title of this article. Some singers think too much of their breathing, some too much of their throat, and others are preoccupied with the organs of articulation. Many ‘methods’ of teaching, so far from curing this sophistication, tend to exaggerate it; and the

last state of the pupil is worse than the first, unless, as sometimes happens by a lucky chance, the mistakes and exaggerations of the 'method' just overbalance the previous sophistications of the pupil.

It is worth while tracing in some detail the origin of one of the most common difficulties of tone-production. It is impossible for an ordinary civilized person not to know that the sound of the voice is originated in the throat, nor is it possible for him not to have heard the words 'high' and 'low' applied to notes. These words are obviously purely figurative when applied to sounds or temperatures or degrees of skill; but the term 'high' applied to a note of the voice gives the impression that an effort is needed to reach it. This is quite a correct idea, for the muscles which are responsible for tensing the vocal cords usually<sup>1</sup> have to work harder for a high note than a low one. Owing, however, to a peculiarity of the nerve-supply to the larynx, when these muscles are tensed in response to a message from the auditory centres a feeling of muscular strain is *not* telegraphed to the brain as it would be, for instance, if the lips were pressed together.

To put the matter in another way: to a savage or a child, as far as sensations in the throat are concerned, a high note within the compass of the voice is just as easy to sing as a low note. But the sophisticated person is not content with this, so he satisfies his desire to feel an effort in the throat by contracting some of the muscles in which he *can* feel a strain—often the muscles concerned with the act of swallowing. This usually has the effect of making one part of the complicated air-resonator of the voice shorter and narrower at a place where such changes have a very marked influence upon the quality of the musical note. Faults of this kind are primarily psychological, and their cure is often very far from being a simple matter. A cut-and-dried 'method' that produces good results with one singer will often

<sup>1</sup> Those who know a good deal about the mechanism of the voice will see the force of the 'usually'.



be useless or worse with half a dozen others. And the same thing is true of sets of exercises.

The subordinate who has thought of a reform which he is really anxious to bring about, i.e. one who is not anxious only to call attention to himself as a reformer, will be well advised to bring the matter before his superior in such a way that that official may manage to suppose that he had really had the idea himself. The head of the singing-department in the human organization is the ear, and, whatever splendid ideas the teacher or singer has about technique, unless the ear finally does the ordering something is almost certain to go wrong.

And now we come to another complication. We have seen—or rather the physiologists and anatomists will tell us mere singers—that we can contract the muscles of our larynx without being conscious of any feeling there. We know on our own account that the breathing-muscles can also contract without our being conscious of it—as they do during sleep—but we also know that we can control the breathing consciously, and this introduces the danger that instead of the breathing going on easily and ‘naturally’, in response to a command from the auditory centres it may be controlled independently during singing by definite attention to its muscular sensations.

Systems of voice-training lay stress (and rightly, I think) upon breathing-exercises, and there is no doubt that breathing can be much improved by a well-devised system of exercises. But the final object of the singer is to sing, not to breathe, and it is quite easy for his breathing powers to improve without any corresponding improvement in his singing; for his interest in the way his breathing apparatus is working distracts his attention from the world of sound, out of which it should not be allowed to stray for the fraction of a second when he is actually singing.

Singers are sometimes recommended to do breathing-exercises while raising and lowering the arms. I have seen such exercises criticized on the ground that, since

the arms are not raised above the head during singing, it is useless to practise breathing in this way. Apart from the question whether the exercises themselves are good or not, this form of criticism is based on an entire misconception of the function of exercises for the voice. The reason for all such exercises may be summed up by saying that their object is to make sure that a machine which works efficiently in all its parts is put under the control of the ear.

A similar criticism has been made of humming-exercises: that, as one does not sing with the mouth shut, exercises done with the mouth shut are waste of time. As a matter of fact, it is possible to make humming-exercises extremely useful in forming an association between certain sounds and certain sensations; though this is not the place for the exposition of the details of such exercises. This criticism of humming-exercises is doubly unfortunate because it is plain that a good many 'm's, 'n's, and 'ng's have to be 'sung', and also because the main object of such exercises is to put part of the singing-instrument in good working order, not necessarily to 'copy' what it has to do in a song. No one offers as a criticism of the game of football that one does not have to tear wildly up and down a field (except on the rare occasions when one is being chased by a bull) in ordinary life. Every one—except members of the 'sporting' public—knows that games, on their physical side, are designed to keep the body in a healthy condition.

The mention of the word 'instrument' brings one to other complications in dealing with the voice. The term 'voice' is here used, and should, I think, be kept to mean a mechanism, not a sound. Much confusion arises from the habit which writers and teachers have of using the word 'voice' in two different senses, or even three; sometimes for the whole mechanism which produces the sound, sometimes for part of it, and sometimes for the actual sound produced. The habit of switching off suddenly from one meaning to another, and then back again when convenient, is responsible for a great

deal of nonsense and absurdity. As I have pointed out before, in this matter of singing and singing-teaching many terms that begin life as innocent little figurative phrases grow up to be the parents of a whole family of confusions. The main principles of sound-production by the voice are so similar to those in instruments such as the clarinet (a vibrating reed and an air resonator in 'sympathy' with the vibrations) that people have inevitably got the idea that it should be learnt and practised in a way similar to that used for other instruments. But though the similarities may be interesting to the theorist who is classifying instruments and has to put the voice in somewhere, to the practical man the differences between the voice and every other instrument are the things that are of fundamental importance.

There is no other instrument where the variations of pitch are brought about by the changing tension of the vibrating body;<sup>1</sup> there is no other instrument where the change of pitch of a note is not associated with some kind of conscious muscular change (as a rule, visually obvious as well). The final and perhaps the most important difference of all may be brought out by answering an imaginary objector to some of these statements. It may be said that if the word 'voice' is to be reserved for the instrument or mechanism that produces the sound, does not this make nonsense of such a term as 'Voice-training'? For how can you train an instrument? Well, the answer is, of course, that you cannot train an instrument, you can only train a person to use it, unless the instrument happens to be part of the body. Now, the voice *is* part of the body, and any one who practises singing for a year has, at the end of that time, an instrument to play on different from the one he began with. If the exercises are done under wise direction, this is a great advantage, but it is not very easy to see how this adds to the simplicity of singing.

<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps overstated; brass instruments work to some extent in this way.

By this time the timid amateur who has had the patience to follow me so far will probably say 'Could you please stop', but I am going to ask him or her to consider two paradoxes of singing-practice, and there will be a word of encouragement at the end. One is that tone-production exercises should always be started by doing a good deal of preliminary work upon those notes and vowel-sounds that the individual voice can naturally do the best; and, in general, if you are anxious to make your voice of good *quality* throughout, you must practise your good notes much more than your bad ones. The other is merely a different form of the same principle, namely, that, if some of the notes of your voice are of poor quality, you will not necessarily improve them by continually practising them. The reason for these things lies in the peculiarities of the vocal instrument and its control. A superficial reasoning by analogy goes like this: 'If you are learning the piano and you find that one of your fingers is weak, it is obvious that you must do exercises with that finger; therefore, if you are learning singing and you find one of your notes is weak, you must do exercises on that note to strengthen it.' If the fallacy in this argument cannot be seen, we will put it the other way round: 'If you have a weak note in your voice you practise it till it gets stronger, so that if you have a bad note on your piano you hammer on it till it gets better.'

Well, that settles the argument all right. But a cause is not necessarily wrong because it is badly argued, so we must give positive reasons for our paradoxical rules. The reason for singing your best notes most often is to give your ear a good model.

Voice-trainers have been slow in learning to make use of this principle. As far as quality is concerned, voice-training is not a matter of making the vocal muscles stronger, but of learning a more exact and subtle co-ordination; this can only be done through the ear. The poor notes are produced by just the same muscles as the good ones. Mere scales and exercises have no

tendency in themselves to improve the quality of a voice; in fact, a bad tone may easily be stereotyped through their means.

To sum up: when we consider that the singing of a single syllable involves the exact co-ordination of three complicated sets of muscles—those of breathing, phonation, and articulation; that the control of the first set is partly automatic and partly conscious, so that the rate and extent of inspiration is—within certain limits—under the control of the will; that the second set—certainly as far as pitch is concerned—is entirely under the control of the auditory centres of the brain; and that the third set (the muscles which are responsible for movements of the jaw, lips, tongue, and soft palate) is connected with a veritable maze of visual, tactual, muscular and—most important of all—auditory sensations: when we consider that the sensations connected with the singing of such a syllable are partly due to the feelings of muscular tensions in the first and last sets of muscles (rendered more puzzling by the absence of corresponding sensations in the second set), partly due to the vibratory motion of the air in the resonators and to the sympathetic vibrations set up in the bones of the face, nose, and chest, and partly due finally to the actual current of air—this last being very slight but quite enough to mislead many people into thinking that in some way it ‘carries’ the sound: when we consider all this, I say, we need not be surprised that those who have not trained themselves very carefully in habits of accurate reasoning (which also has a technique) are inclined to make a muddle of their terms and theories.

The final word of encouragement we can get from the writings of Bishop Berkeley:

You see, Hylas, the water of yonder fountain, how it is forced upwards, in a round column, to a certain height; at which it breaks, and falls back into the basin from whence it rose; its ascent as well as descent, proceeding from the same uniform law or principle of gravitation. Just so, the same

Principles which, at first view lead to Scepticism, pursued to a certain point, bring men back to common sense. (Third Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous.)

We have only to apply this to our own special case. It is not necessary for the student or amateur to have a profound knowledge of, or to worry himself about, these theoretical considerations and complexities *provided always*, as our legal friends say, he does not make up a theory of his own based upon a very inadequate set of facts. If he has a good discriminative ear, i.e. one which not only hears intervals clearly but one which readily distinguishes different qualities of sound, he can arrive at a fairly high level of skill in the art of singing, with the expenditure of much less time and trouble upon purely technical matters than is necessary in the study of any other musical instrument. The ear must always be his chief guide, but if he concludes from this that he wants no other he has misunderstood the purpose of this chapter.

## CHAPTER XII

### ACOUSTICS AND SINGING

But just as 'the evil that men do lives after them', misleading terminology continues to work havoc in the minds of learners long after its falsehood has been recognized by teachers, who, however, adhere to it from a mistaken notion of its practical usefulness. It is no exaggeration to say that most of the confusion in which the whole subject of voice production is still involved is caused by the use of terms either wrong in themselves or wrongly applied.

MORELL MACKENZIE.

IN the course of a fairly extensive study of the literature of singing, and in the following of controversies upon vocal subjects, I have been struck by a nearly universal weakness which is shown. I refer to the ignorance of certain elementary facts of acoustics displayed by writers and controversialists alike. Not only charlatans who have a quack cure-all 'method of voice-production' to unload on the public, but also responsible teachers and able anatomists, are continually publishing statements about the voice which every student of elementary acoustics knows to be absolutely incorrect. The mere singer's excursions into the land of science may naturally be expected to result in a certain amount of confusion—at least of terminology—but it is surprising to find, in a book full of accurate information and sound common sense, an eminent throat-specialist writing this: 'The direction of the column of sound through the mouth is another matter needing attention. It must be projected against the roof of the cavity behind the upper front teeth, from which it rebounds sharply and *cleanly* to the outside.'<sup>1</sup>

Pianistic literature is not free from similar absurdities, but with that we are not here concerned.

Direct research and the infiltration of knowledge from other fields have put the anatomical and, to a less

<sup>1</sup> *The Hygiene of the Vocal Organs*, Sir Morell Mackenzie, M.D. Macmillan, 1886.

extent, the physiological parts of the science of tone-production by the voice on a fairly firm basis, so that those who no longer agree that the cause of the vocal sounds that the listener hears is primarily the vibration of the singer's vocal cords, and secondarily the amplification due to the resonating powers of certain air-spaces above are not much more common than the flat-earthers or the geocentrics.

The chief culprit in the more modern orgy of misunderstanding is the word 'resonance'. It is continually being used glibly as an explanation of vocal action by people who obviously have never taken the smallest trouble to acquaint themselves, by practical methods, with its meaning, or even to follow carefully the explanations in elementary books upon sound, where writers have tried to make the matter clear to those who have not undergone an initiation into the mysteries of science in a physics laboratory. For much of the muddle, there is singularly little excuse, but perhaps the most fruitful cause in general, as I have had occasion to point out before, is that those 'artists' who decide to talk about the principles and theory of their art do not realize in the least that talking about art is, or should be, a scientific occupation. It is essential, therefore, that those who write about the mechanism of the voice should have a clear conception of the meaning of the terms they use and be careful that they are used in a consistent manner. Moreover, it is of great importance that when terms are borrowed from well-established sciences there should be a very careful indication if they are to be used in a sense differing from that attached to the terms in the science in question. However, many people seem to think otherwise, and, armed with a sinus from a misunderstood diagram of the skull, a diaphragm from a first-aid book, and a large supply of secondhand resonations and vibrations, they proceed to build a fantastic castle in the acoustic air.

Some of the confusion is no doubt due to the capacity which unimaginative—or perhaps over-imaginative



people have for taking metaphorical phrases literally. There was a time when the use of the terms 'chest-voice' and 'head-voice' caused a good many people to suppose that the sound was actually manufactured in or came from the chest or the head. The tincture of physical science that has been added to modern forms of education has reduced the number of such people considerably.

But the *sensations* in the chest and head still remain to be 'explained', so the terms 'chest-resonance' and 'head-resonance' are employed by people who seem to have only the vaguest notions of the structure of the chest (which they seem to regard as a kind of air-balloon) and none at all of the principles of resonance. For them, however, these terms have the advantage, in the present state of commonly disseminated knowledge, of being much more difficult for the layman to criticize—even if he wants to, because most people seem to like a little touch of mystery in their art technique and are liable to regard any one who supplies real criticism rather in the light of a tiresome 'know-all' divulging the secrets of a conjuring-trick.

The trained physicist will, if he is asked, and sometimes when he is not, make short work of such pseudo-explanations. If he does not indulge in frivolous jibes at singers' skulls by making possible exceptions in their case, he will tell you that the air-cavities of the skull—the frontal and sphenoidal cavities—are neither in a position nor in a condition of volume or opening to amplify the sounds originated by the vibrations of the vocal cords to any extent that could possibly be appreciated by an ear situated at a distance. He would also tell you, as Sir Richard Paget has already done in his book on human speech, that the air-cavities of the chest may, as far as their resonating powers are concerned, be represented by a box filled with a damp sponge. Any one is, of course, at liberty to see how much 'resonance' he can get out of this piece of apparatus.

What then remains of such phrases? Merely this,

that you may get sensations in the chest or in the head when singing, and that it is sometimes useful to concentrate attention upon such sensations—but this matter will be discussed more fully later.

We may deal with some other confusions more categorically by stating definitely certain experimental results.

If we take a flask-shaped vessel with a short neck and hold the prongs of a vibrating tuning-fork over the mouth, there sometimes results a very large amplification of sound—the success of this amplification depends upon a certain relation between the size, shape, and opening of the flask and the vibration rate of the fork. Under such circumstances the air in the flask is set into what may be called sympathetic vibration of a concertina-like nature, and surges in and out of the opening with a gradually decreasing amplitude, till rest is again reached. The physicist uses the term ‘resonance’ for this phenomenon, and the vessel is called a resonator. Resonance in general is no more than getting a greatly increased vibratory, oscillatory, or swinging movement by means of small successive pushes or impulses accurately timed.

If the mouth is set for the pronunciation of a well-articulated O, with the lips somewhat protruded, and then a vibrating tuning-fork giving out the middle B<sub>4</sub> of a woman’s voice is held in front of it, it will be found possible, with a little practice, to find the exact position which will cause a considerable amplification of the sound by the resonance of the air in the mouth. The position may conveniently be found by whispering the sound O, the small current of air from the whisper having no appreciable effect upon the resonance. A slight movement of the lips or tongue or soft palate will, however, often cause a considerable difference. If the same note is sung, the initial vibration is started from the other end of the resonator, but the response is of the same kind and is affected or not affected by the same changes indicated above.

In singing, therefore, the air which comes from the lungs (which, in good vowel singing, is such a small current that on a foggy day it can be seen to trickle almost vertically upwards past the nose after leaving the lips) has for its function something precisely similar to that of the bow in fiddle-playing—it sets the cords in vibration and then pushes the air already in the throat- and mouth-cavities forward so that an equivalent amount escapes past the lips. The air which does the resonance is the air *already* filling those cavities. There are many phrases and methods of talking about vocal sound that either state or imply that the breath (i.e. the air-current) carries the tone. Well, it doesn't; and any one may see that it doesn't—by the time that the air which has caused the vibration of the cords has got about half-way from the larynx to the lips, the wave-front of the sound has travelled some hundreds of yards.

If good singers were to take the trouble to learn to describe accurately their sensations when they sing, these descriptions would be very useful to other singers. But they are usually not content to do this. They seem to have an inveterate tendency to launch forth into what they doubtless suppose are explanations of the acoustic happenings that cause these sensations, forgetting that they are untrained in the methods and language of science, and ignorant, as a rule, of the very nature of an explanation. Till, finally, after their remarks have been translated from one language to another, we find that we are expected to get practical aid from this kind of thing:

To attack a tone, the breath must be directed to a focal point on the palate, which lies under the critical point for each different tone: this must be done with a certain decisiveness. There must however be no pressure on this place; for the overtones must be able to soar above, and sound with, the tone. The palate has to furnish, besides, the top cover against which the breath strikes, also an extremely elastic floor for the breath sounding above it against the hard palate or in the nose. This breath, by forming the overtones, makes certain the connexion with the resonance of the head cavities. In order to bring out

the colour of the tone, the whirling currents must vivify all the vocal sounds that enter into it and draw them into their circles with an ever-increasing, soaring tide of sound.

The only parts of this passage that emerge with a clear meaning from the whirling currents of obscurity do so merely in order to make themselves acoustically absurd. It is true that this book was published in 1902 and that there has been a new edition since—from which any one may draw any conclusion he likes—but my unwillingness to buy the new edition and see what had happened to this passage need not necessarily be put down to meanness. As it stands, it is too good an example to be lost. It contains such a large proportion of the arsenal of what may be called the emotio-explosives of pseudo-science, and brings out with great clearness the confusion of thought that prevents so many writers from distinguishing between the motions of translation of particles of air in a current of breath and the transmission of vibration by the action of contiguous particles on one another.

It is to be remarked that metaphors seem less dangerous in other departments of human activity. If some one says that he is going out to send a wire, no one supposes that a small piece of metal will travel from one post-office to another and that the telegraph-boy will arrive with it between his teeth or focused on the handle-bars; and, though it would be correct to say that he rings his bell with a certain decisiveness and that his tyres form an extremely elastic floor for him to soar above, this, though correct (which the acoustic passage is not), would be an unnecessarily pompous way of describing the commonplaces of bicycle-riding.

We have had examples of acoustics according to a physician and according to a singer, and we may add the contribution of an actor to this vexed science:

Volume of voice comes from the diaphragm, and all good stage speakers obtain their power from these muscles. Voices that proceed from the upper part of the chest can never produce that pleasing 'vibrato' note associated with resonance. It is

curious to note in connexion with 'loudness' of tone that an actor may often think his voice is not carrying when he does not hear it distinctly, whereas the fact is that when the actor does not hear his voice it proves that it is reaching the distant parts of the theatre, as there is little rebound. (*Acting: Its Theory and Practice*. Lane Cranford. Constable.)

Any one who said that the biceps muscle bends the arm when it contracts and extends the arm when it relaxes would be contradicted at once; but innumerable people state that the diaphragm draws air in when it contracts and pushes 'the voice' out when it relaxes—a curious privilege, accorded no doubt to a foreign-sounding name—always potent in matters of art. One also wonders how a messenger proves he has arrived at his destination merely by not coming back.

It may be of some use now to remove some of these phrases from the realm of mystery into that of common sense.

You cannot *sing in the mask*; but you can have a sensation in the bones of the face when you sing.

You cannot *hold your voice on your upper teeth*; but you can sing in such a way that it is possible, with the exercise of a little imagination, perhaps, to feel as if something were being held there.

You cannot *focus your voice with the uvula and soft-palate*, because sound does not work like that—as any physicist will tell you—but small differences in the position of the soft palate often make very marked differences in the quality and intensity of sound heard by the listener, and these differences, as in the other cases, are associated with differences of muscular sensation on the part of the singer.

Nor can you *support your voice on your diaphragm*, because the term 'voice' must be used either for a sound or for the mechanism that produces the sound, neither of which, as any one will agree, can be supported on that useful dome of muscle which, when it flattens, draws air into the lungs; but attention to breathing-sensations is sometimes useful for distracting attention from the throat.

It seems fairly probable that all these phrases have been invented by some one trying to explain the mechanism of singing by working backwards from his sensations,<sup>1</sup> and, though they fail signally in this respect, they draw attention to sensations that are sometimes associated with good tone-production; and they all have the negative virtue of not mentioning the throat.

Another thing about which people are inclined to make a mystery—though the phrase used is reasonable enough—is the carrying-power of a voice. A voice is said to carry well when the sound of it can be heard plainly in all parts of a large hall or theatre. Some singers are supposed to be endowed with the power of making their pianissimo passages, their 'lightest whisper', carry into the uttermost parts of a large auditorium. It is undoubtedly a fact that some singers are much more successful in this way than others. But there is not necessarily any mystery in this; there may be a simple or comparatively simple explanation. As soon as we leave the concert-hall and return to the matter-of-fact psychological conditions of ordinary life, we find a simple law expressing the action of sound in this respect, namely, that loud sounds carry farther than soft ones. The street-crier and news-boy recognize this and act upon it. The noises they make are usually neither intelligible nor beautiful, but succeed very well in their primary function of being audible at a great distance. If we now return to the concert-hall and consider the matter from the listener's side of the question, we shall go some way towards a solution.

The sound produced when a so-called single note is sung has a very complex nature. The exact nature of the complexity does not matter for the moment. The simple parts of which the complex tone is composed are called partials, and it is the number and relative intensity of these partials that determine the quality of sound produced by any instrument. As these partials are

<sup>1</sup> Any one interested in this kind of mental game can try working out the mechanism of running, from the sensations of a 'stitch' in the side.

never of the same loudness in any particular case, it follows that some of them will 'carry' better than others. Thus we have an explanation of the fact that the human voice has a peculiar quality when heard at a distance: a quality distinguishable from a quiet note sung at a short distance.<sup>1</sup> The strident harshness of the news-boy's voice disappears when he passes on to the next street, though he can still be heard quite plainly: the partial tones that gave the harshness have evidently failed to carry the distance.

Every complex sound, therefore, is liable to change its character as the listener goes farther from the source. This is part, but not all of the explanation of the fact that the quality of some voices seems decidedly different when they are heard in a large hall after one has become accustomed to them in a small room.

Certain complexities of the matter are shown by the following quotation from Lord Rayleigh's book on sound.

It is unfortunately not possible to estimate the relative 'loudness' of two notes of different pitch with any degree of accuracy by the ear alone.

And again:

If a composite musical note, consisting of a fundamental tone with its octave etc. be sounded near a grove of trees, for example, the ratio of the intensity of the octave to that of the fundamental will in the scattered sound be 16 times what it was in the original note. . . . The scattered sound may therefore appear to be raised in pitch by an octave.

A somewhat similar effect may be expected when singing goes on in a room crowded with many small objects.

In general, therefore, we should expect the well-

<sup>1</sup> If the dampers of a piano are raised by depressing the sustaining pedal and a loud and distinct *ah* is sung—the middle *A* of a man's voice is a good note to choose—the sound given back by the piano when the sung note ceases reminds one strongly of the same note and vowel sung by a choir at a distance. The experimenter may then refer to the nearest able physicist for an explanation.

balanced voice, that is to say, one with the fundamentals and other partials sounding strongly, to carry best. Vocal sounds of this kind are what most people admire and call well-produced; so that the singer who attends to the quality of his voice in this respect need not bother about acquiring any particular 'carrying power', or wonder how to follow out instructions to 'apply his voice to the opposite side of the hall in which he is singing'.

The power which the ear has of following the melodic phrase of some particular instrument in the complicated maze of sound produced by a full orchestra obviously depends upon some recognizable constancy of quality in that instrumental sound. In the visual field, there is a similar power which enables a meandering line of constant colour to be followed with ease through the complicated markings on a map, or even a continuous line of constant thickness of the same colour as the rest of the map. This shows the importance of evenness of quality in different parts of the compass of the voice; and of evenness of loudness, too, when the vocal line has to be followed through the distractions of instrumental accompaniment. It should be noted that absolute evenness of intensity of tone is only occasionally a virtue, but a full discussion of what is meant by really good legato singing would be out of place here. Even 'legato' itself is not of much use as an isolated virtue: cats have it to a remarkable degree, but ruin its effect by the excessive use of portamento.

The explanation of the 'lightest whisper' mystery brings us again to the point of view that most writers seem so unwilling to consider: that of the people who are listening. The main part of the solution is simple, for it is largely a matter of attention on the part of the audience. A pianissimo passage will not reach the ear of a listener at the back of a hall over the heads of a fidgety audience. It will only do so when the interest of the audience as a whole is sufficiently aroused to make them keep quite still. The silence under these conditions



is of a different order from that engendered by ordinary politeness, even when the supply of this commodity is equal to the demand. The better and more interesting—or even the more famous and expensive—the singer is, the more likely is it that this kind of silence on the part of the audience will occur. So arises the idea that some singers are endowed with the power of outlawing themselves from the realm of acoustics for their own purposes.

The actual acoustical side of the question is both interesting and important. Without special practice, there is a tendency for singers to have the air-spaces of the throat and mouth less widely dilated during soft singing than during loud. This tendency has to be checked if a note of the same quality is required differing only in loudness. Singing with the jaw less widely open, and with certain throat muscles and soft palate relaxed, tends to muffle the lower partials in the complex vocal sound, i.e. just those partials which give the listener a definite idea of the pitch of the note that the voice is supposed to be singing. When this happens it is difficult to follow the melody, and this amounts in practice to a difficulty in hearing at all, because, as mentioned before, there are so many sounds in the orchestral or instrumental accompaniment claiming the attention. One of the many virtues of Caruso's singing was this definite impression of pitch with which it was always associated, so that there was never any doubt about the note or the melody. But there are two comments to be made here: one is that there are certain acoustical reasons why it is easier for a tenor to do this than a bass, and the other is the necessary admission that Caruso's piano singing corresponded roughly with other singers' forte!

Finally, it is plain that most tone-production and most vocal exercises have to be done upon one vowel-sound or another. I have yet to discover the author of a 'method' who shows signs of having taken the smallest pains to acquaint himself with the research that has been

done in the last two or three decades upon the acoustical nature of these sounds. In this country, Sir Richard Paget has done much research in the analysing of vowel-sounds by the use of his own very sensitive and trained ear: he has then checked his results in the most conclusive way possible by making complicated resonators of plasticine, the air of which, when energized in the appropriate way, gives out an easily recognizable vowel-sound. D. C. Miller, in America, has approached the matter by analysing the curve tracings of a very sensitive recording-apparatus. Any singer with a sensitive ear for this kind of thing can easily satisfy himself by simple experiments on his own voice of the correctness of the main facts established by these entirely independent methods.

The hard-pressed advocate of some—scientifically speaking—entirely exploded ‘method’ is liable at an awkward dialectical moment to say that you can’t learn to sing by doing science. This remark has the double disadvantage here of being both irrelevant and unnecessary. Irrelevant, because the object of this chapter is to show that singers in general do not make very good scientists, and many of them seem quite unaware of the fact. The spectacle of a professor, after a life devoted to physics, standing on the concert-platform giving a lieder recital is, I think, a rare one; but the converse, where the great singer, after a life devoted to art, stands, metaphorically speaking, on the lecture-room rostrum and instructs us in physics is by no means uncommon. Unnecessary, because responsible writers upon the anatomy, physiology, psychology, and physics connected with the vocal organ have usually made no claims to be competent to sing or to teach singing.

Once again, if famous singers, when they talk or write about their art, would only enter the kingdom of science as little children and learn to describe simply and accurately the things that they really know from their own experience, how much they might teach us. A great singer may or may not be qualified to discuss the

scientific questions that arise out of his art, but, if he is qualified, his qualifications have very little to do with the greatness of his art, though that very greatness may put him in possession of certain facts that other people would very much like to know.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The criticism of isolated passages is not to be taken as implying a general condemnation of the books in which they occur: the passages are merely taken as illustrations of the low level of acoustical knowledge in books about the voice, books that for other reasons I have recommended and should still recommend students to read.

## CHAPTER XIII

### RHYTHM

**M**OST people who write about rhythm in music seem to try to escape, in one way or another, from the contemplation of the fact that rhythmical effects are based on equality of time-intervals. When they catch sight of this fact, which indeed they cannot help doing occasionally, they proceed—as a famous Prime Minister was once accused of doing to a fact inconvenient to his immediate controversial purpose—to bury it under a heap of rhetoric.

The discomfort which many people feel when an attempt is made to analyse the processes of the technique of any art may be due to their regarding art as a kind of conjuring. The chief objects of the conjuror are to puzzle and surprise; a knowledge of his methods tends to render his tricks ineffective. But the object of the artist is to delight the senses through which we experience aesthetic pleasure, and so to bring about that stimulation of the imagination which is the essence of all art. These objects are not affected by a knowledge of his technical processes. The philosopher with the most profound knowledge of physiology is just as susceptible to the prick of a pin as his less instructed neighbours.

Some of the most fascinating works of art are those that produce their effects by the simplest means, so that there is very little need to be afraid that the dignity or mystery of the art of music will be removed if it be found on examination that one of its chief pleasures is associated with something as simple as the division of its duration into equal intervals.

No one will agree with the unqualified statement that playing in time is the same thing as playing rhythmically. On the other hand, the same person who has contemptuously disagreed with such a statement will probably pause a little before answering the question whether one

can play rhythmically without playing in time. The verbally fluent will fill up this interval with rhetoric in which, as likely as not, the magic word 'personality' will play a prominent part. But it would be better to employ the time in considering that paradoxes of this kind are always due to the inadequacy of the verbal symbols used. The use of the same word for things differing in nature—or differing only in degree—is one of the most fruitful sources of confusion of thought and the profitless controversy which is its inevitable attendant.

The rhetorical method of attacking the difficult question of the meaning of the word 'rhythm' has already been mentioned. Most of us know the story which illustrates another method: that of the theological lecturer who said, 'Here we come to a very difficult passage; let us look it boldly in the face and pass on.' In the last section of *The Prelude to Poetry*,<sup>1</sup> there is a reprint of an address delivered some years ago by Dr. Robert Bridges. The paragraph headed 'Rhythm of Words' begins, 'Rhythm is a difficult subject, and we must be content to let it pass'. At first sight this seems weaker even than the attitude of the theologian, for Dr. Bridges apparently wastes no time in trying to stare the difficulty out of countenance; but he immediately repents of this weakness, and goes on to say that an idea of rhythm may be got by watching a good skater or dancer.

This illustration is helpful in clearing up our ideas of the meaning of the word, for here it is obviously used in connexion with the regular reiteration of a set of visual impressions. The skater's 'bar' begins when he strikes off with one foot or the other; the position and balance of the body then alters till the supporting foot is able to give the push which transfers the weight to the other foot, which finishes the second part of the 'bar'.

But why go to skating or dancing for an example of rhythm? Why not use walking as an example, for, with the exception of small details, the same analysis applies?

<sup>1</sup> 'Everyman' Series. J. M. Dent.

The answer is that walking is not such a good example because the beats are more rapid, and, owing to familiarity, are easily grasped as a whole. That is to say, the word 'rhythmic' is not usually applied to rapid reiteration of sounds, sights or motions which are not easily analysable into elements.

We should not apply the term 'rhythmical' to the regular beat of a carpenter's hammer as he drives a nail into a plank. But three navvies driving a wedge into the surface of the road often produce a very satisfactory rhythm because the sounds of the three beats are distinguishable, and there is a feeling of disappointment if a beat comes out of time or if one of the workmen misses his stroke. So too the beat of a boy's stick as he drags it along some palings would be called regular, not rhythmical; but the beats of the heart, even when they appear to be regularly spaced—as sometimes happens—are almost always referred to as rhythmic, because the beats are distinguishable both as to strength and quality.

It seems reasonable, therefore, to define rhythm in music as being the regular reiteration of a pattern of two or more beats, and rhythmical playing as being such playing as makes this regular reiteration clear. It is in this sense that the terms are used in this chapter. Some people will doubtless feel that it is a very inadequate definition of what they mean by rhythm, but it does at least face the difficulty by putting a little stiffening into a word which has been weakened into vagueness by misuse.

If we now return to the distinction between playing in time and playing rhythmically, it is only necessary to allow a certain amount of latitude in the interpretation of the phrase 'playing in time'. For there are really two ways of playing in time. Of these, one gives pleasure and the other, as a rule, does not. It is the former that is called playing rhythmically.

At first sight it is not clear how there can be more than one kind of playing in time, for it seems that the notes must either be given their correct values or not. But the

latitude spoken of before applies to the size of the units chosen. A musical phrase which is divided up into bars of four crotchets may be played so that each crotchet takes up the same amount of time. If this were done it would naturally follow that each bar would take the same time—exactly four times as long as each crotchet. It is plain, however, that there are other ways of keeping to the equality of the larger unit, the bar; for various liberties may be taken with the individual crotchets without interfering with the length of the bar. And these liberties may themselves be regular or irregular. Every first crotchet in each bar may last a little longer than the other three; or any crotchet in any bar may be lengthened provided that the time is made up elsewhere within the limits of that bar.

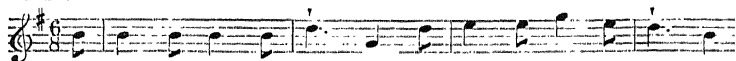
Speaking very generally—of course there will be exceptions—it is the equality of the larger units which is of importance; it is the bar and not the beat which must be kept regular in order to give a satisfactory effect.

The performer often puts unnecessary difficulties in his way by not choosing his rhythmical unit on a sufficiently large scale. The rhythmic unit of the waltz, for instance, should be no smaller than two bars long; when it is taken smaller than that the dance will always lack a certain character or swing. The first beat of every two-bar unit should be strictly in its correct time-position, and made sufficiently emphatic in one way or another to catch the attention of the dancer. If this rule is adhered to, the performer may take all sorts of time-liberties without being found out; no one minds very much if he occasionally stops playing in waltz-time, and, as every one knows, the dancers themselves often alter their steps from a three-beat to a two-beat measure.

The so-called 'jazz-bands' as a rule play waltzes badly. Their usual music does not encourage them to think in large units. As far as rhythm is concerned, they think parochially rather than imperially.

Even in 6/8 measure when the tempo is rapid, a two-bar unit is often quite small enough. A subtle emphasis on the words 'schweifen', 'pfeifen', &c., swings 'Der Musensohn' along with a much more satisfactory stride, and also incidentally prevents him from putting down his foot too decidedly at places where no emphasis is wanted.

Ex. 1.



Durch Feld und Wald zu schweifen, mein Liedchen weg zu pfei - fen

As a rule the choice of a small rhythmical unit tends to make music sound mechanical and monotonous, but there are special effects to be got in this way which must by no means be despised.

It is very seldom, however, that a small unit rigidly adhered to is permissible in singing, for the simple reason that it makes the words sound formal and unnatural. The singer generally requires a little more elasticity within the bar or rhythmical unit than the instrumental player. These liberties are less noticeable in singing on account of what may be called the listener's expectation of irregularity where verbal syllables are concerned. In fact, the time durations of the syllables of spoken words and sentences are so unequal that it might be supposed that it would hardly be possible to set the syllables of any poem to a succession of equal notes without robbing the words entirely of their elasticity and vitality. To those, however, who are susceptible to the language of any art, a very small hint is all that is needed; and so it comes about that on occasions such as these, the amount of variation which has to be made by the singer in order to *suggest* the naturalness of the spoken word is very slight, and it can be done with the minimum of damage to the musical form of the bar or phrase.

The song 'Bitte', by Robert Franz, is written in such a way that, with the exception of one word in the first



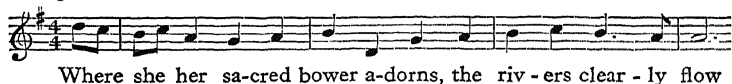
line and one in the last, each syllable throughout the song has the same duration:

Ex. 2.



Campion's 'Where she her sacred bower adorns' has very much the same character:

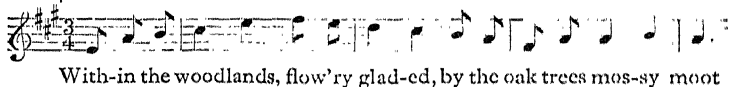
Ex. 3.



In such songs a fairly rigid adherence to exact equality in the duration of the crotchets is in keeping with the smooth and dignified character of the music, so that the danger of an impression of monotony and formality in the regularly following syllables has to be overcome by really fine legato singing combined with nicely graded emphases on the important words in each verbal phrase. If this is not done properly the music changes from a hymn into a hearse carrying the dead body of the poem—not into a dirge, be it noted, for a dirge is a medium for the expression of living grief.

As an example of a song where the words may be easily deprived of all their charm by a too conscientious attitude towards time-values within the bar, we may take Vaughan Williams's 'Linden Lea':

Ex. 4.



Here the rhythmical unit should be no shorter than one bar long, and when the general musical structure has been grasped, the words should be allowed to take charge of the situation. If the listener then discovers that the music has been tampered with, it merely means that the words have abused their position of authority. It is hardly necessary to add that it is the singer's business to see that this does not happen.

The singer who wishes to sing rhythmically should always begin by studying his songs as pieces of music pure and simple. He should go through the song a good many times, using the voice as a musical instrument only, not as a verbal one. If he can get some instrumentalist, a fiddler or a clarinettist, to play the melody to him, so much the better. When he has a clear idea of the 'shape' of the song as a piece of music, he is not nearly so liable to take unjustifiable liberties with the rhythm in his attempts to bring off verbal and dramatic effects. Unless the song is very badly written, he should find no difficulty in producing all the effects he wants without interfering with the rights of the music. He will find that he has considerable freedom within the limits of the rhythmical sections.

If we take at random a dozen singers and a dozen instrument players—the only necessary qualification of the two classes being that they shall be good enough to be listened to with pleasure by the ordinary music-lover—we shall almost certainly find that the instrumentalists have had a more strenuous training and are better musicians than the singers. This in itself will be sufficient to account for the generally recognized weakness of the ordinary singer as far as time-keeping and rhythm are concerned, but to be quite fair it is necessary to consider some of the difficulties which are peculiar to the art of singing.

For the instrument player the beginning of the bar—or the incidence of the individual beat—coincides with the time when he presses down his key,<sup>1</sup> plucks his string, or draws his bow across it. But the peculiarities of the sung word are such that the singer, except on the occasions when his word begins with a vowel, has to anticipate the beat.

*Every vocal bar or beat begins with a vowel.* We will begin by considering this fact, which is one of the inevitable

<sup>1</sup> The pause between the pressing down of the key and the 'speaking' of the pipe makes the use of some stops on the organ very vague and tiresome to listen to (on the rhythmical side) when used in conjunction with stops that speak more readily.

difficulties of fitting words and music together, and afterwards go on to consider another, which is the result of carelessness of notation on the part of composers; or, to put the matter a little less accusingly, the result of the necessary simplification of the visual signs which have to stand for something very complicated in the auditory field. Although these are difficulties which the trained musician might take in his stride if he, after instrumental training, turned his attention to singing, yet it has to be remembered that a great many singers do not get a previous training of this kind, so that they have to be warned against the musical faults to which their art is specially prone. On the other hand, the instrumentalist himself is liable to mistake the time at which he makes an effort to articulate an initial consonant for the time that marks the beat for the listener. The exact nature of this error will be discussed in what follows.

A good example to take is Schubert's 'Aufenthalt'. A well-marked rhythm is the most important trait in the character of this song. By a well-marked rhythm is meant one where the landmarks—to borrow a word from the visual world—are made quite clear to the listener:

Ex. 5.

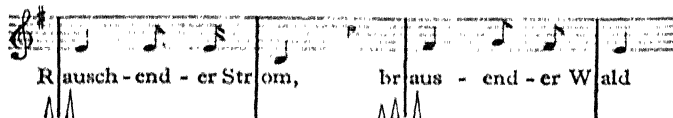
The musical score for Ex. 5 is presented in two systems. The first system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The piano accompaniment features a strong, regular rhythmic pattern in the right hand, with chords and eighth notes. The vocal line is in the treble clef. The second system continues the piano accompaniment and includes the lyrics "Rausch-end - er Strom" written below the notes.

By the time the six bars of the introduction are nearing their end the accompanist, unless he has done his work very badly, has established a strong expectation on the part of the listener for the precise moment at which the first beat of the seventh bar should arrive. This is the moment when the voice, according to the literal interpretation of the visual signs, begins also. But if the singer delays his entry until this exact moment he fails entirely to make a satisfactory accent on the first beat, and so fails also, as judged by the listener, to fall in with the previously established rhythm. The reason for this is not difficult to see.

The first word of the phrase begins with the sound represented by the letter *r*. This sound must be started sufficiently early to allow the following *vowel-sound* to coincide exactly with the first beat of the bar. The *r*, like other continuants, is a sound which can and must be sung on a definite note, and a good singer can put a considerable intensity of sound into it. But the following vowel-sound is always appreciably louder. This difference of intensity is still more marked when the word begins with an unvoiced consonant. The consequence is that there are at least two attacks for every word that begins with a consonant. Experiment will quickly convince one that it is the stronger (or strongest) that has to coincide with the instrumental beat, or with the previously established rhythmical expectation.

When therefore a bar, according to the visual signs, begins with a consonant, this consonant must be pulled back into the previous bar. This is shown in the diagram, where the size of the triangles in the lower line indicates roughly the relative intensity of the sounds as the syllable is attacked:

Ex. 6.



It is plain that this diagram overcomes only one of the discrepancies between the visual signs and the sounds they represent. The visual signs are separate, whereas the sounds they represent are continuous; moreover, if the bar-lines are meant to represent the beginning of the bar in time, the crotchet, the *au*, and the large triangle should be printed actually on the line.

The representation of the passage in this way, however, brings out the interesting point that the most awkward collection of verbal sounds in it is set to the shortest note. We find that we have to sing *ersht* (English spelling) to a semiquaver. Schubert tempers what might otherwise seem an unkindness to the singer (for to sing *ersht* to a semiquaver at a fast tempo is beyond the power of most of us) by the instruction 'Nicht zu geschwind, doch kräftig' (Not too fast, yet forceful). But, in spite of warnings of this kind, the commonest sin against rhythmical singing is just that of taking things too fast—too fast, that is, for the articulation technique of the singer.



Many singers take 'Ungeduld' much too fast for themselves; though not necessarily too fast for the music of the vocal line when treated instrumentally, that is, without any verbal complications. Schubert marks it 'Etwas geschwind' (Rather fast); but when we examine the song we find passages like this:



*ichsschr*, all to be sung in the twinkling of a semiquaver. Perhaps this is the worst difficulty, but we also have *ansbr*, *äbsl*, *erkt*n, and so on in the words 'man's brennen', 'gäb's laut', and 'merkt nichts', and all of these are given no more than a semiquaver of time.

These difficulties of articulation really go a long way towards settling the tempo of such songs, at all events for the individual singer, for he may sing the song as fast

as he can manage these sounds on a semiquaver without being late on the following vowel. Let him try singing the song really fast without the accompaniment, and see what happens to the shape of it. It will probably need no more than this to convince him that the essence of the matter is not merely keeping up with the accompaniment somehow.

In other words, if one wishes to take up an unpromisingly conscientious attitude to the song 'Unge-duld', the limit of speed is determined by the length of time it takes to sing *ichssch*; for this determines the shortest length of the semiquaver, of which, naturally, all the other notes must be multiples. Practically, however, the occasional singing of  as , where there are particularly awkward combinations of consonants, does no serious damage to the structure of the song.

Enough has now been said to show why good instrumentalists do not always make a success of their song-rhythms when they turn their attention to singing. It is partly due, as has already been suggested, to a want of recognition of the precise way in which vocal attack differs from instrumental attack, and partly to a lack of the technique of articulation. It is hardly necessary to add that this lack is for the most part the result of sluggish habits of speaking, and does not occur when people are able to articulate their words rapidly and distinctly in ordinary conversation.

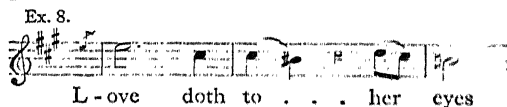
The desire to keep a song moving in a particular way is no doubt the outcome of a certain artistic insight, but the power to bring this desire to fruition is the result, as in other forms of artistic achievement, of technique. The technical secret of such masters of rhythmical singing as the late Mr. Plunket Greene and Sir Harry Lauder lies in a special kind of neatness of the articulation muscles, which enables awkward combinations of consonants to be pronounced rapidly and clearly, and so permits the following vowel-sounds to be placed

with the greatest accuracy 'on the beat'. In unaccompanied singing the beats of the bar are indicated to the listener by the incidence of the vowels. To borrow a metaphor from the parade ground—the consonants are purely cautionary, the word of command is the vowel.

For the unvoiced consonants and their combinations (*p, t, k, st, &c.*) the necessity for anticipation introduces no complications other than a nice adjustment of the anticipation or suspense to the strength of the emphasis required.<sup>1</sup> But the continuants (*l, m, n, v, &c.*) introduce questions of pitch or intonation which have to be considered carefully. For if these sounds have to be sung before the note to which they are apparently written it is obviously necessary to decide exactly what is the pitch of the note on which they must be sung.

Many singers whose rhythmical and dramatic instincts are perfectly sound spoil the style of their singing by not definitely deciding this question for themselves; in fact, a good many of them do not seem to know even that there is a question to decide. In any case the result is a blurred, scooping attack. This is a blemish which is very prevalent among opera singers. It is very disfiguring, for the dramatic emphasis which it is designed to effect can be produced more satisfactorily by a much cleaner style of intonation.

There are two ways in which this can be done: either by singing the initial continuant on the same note as the following vowel, or by singing it on a lower note, which note itself may be either the note of the preceding syllable or one which fits in with the harmony of the preceding beat:<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Emphatic speech depends largely upon this delay of an expected syllable.

<sup>2</sup> I think it better to sing the words as Shakespeare wrote them and sing through the rest rather than follow the many editions which write, 'To her eyes doth love repair': see Chapter IX.

Ex. 9.

R - ausch - end - er Strom,    br - aus - end - er Wald

Ex. 10.

R - ausch - end - er Strom

In Ex. 9 it looks curious to write the 'R' to a D sharp, but none the less it is the best way to start the phrase if a clean and effective emphasis is required. All these attacks can of course be done on the same note as the first of the following bar, but if a really telling emphasis is wanted, the attacks suggested are best, as any one may find by trying the various alternatives. In each case the jump should be a clean one, with no intermediate notes.

What all this amounts to is that when great emphasis is required it is not only allowable but actually necessary to sing such sounds on a lower note. It should be pointed out also that the notation should be taken literally,<sup>1</sup> i.e. the anticipated attack should be on a note, not a rapidly ascending scale of notes. Certain plaintive and legitimately sentimental effects can be got by this last method, but it requires much skill and delicacy to make it tolerable, and its effect fades very rapidly with the frequency of its use.

The other occasions on which singers are misled by

<sup>1</sup> No indication can be given of the exact duration of the anticipation indicated by the small notes.



musical notation are those that are connected with the taking of breath. When there are a few bars of instrumental prelude or interlude there is obviously no excuse for the singer who does not realize that he must fill his lungs a beat or two before the time that the instrumental rhythm has fixed for him to begin. Apart from this, however, composers seem to take a malicious delight in misleading the unwary beginner by indicating that the sound is to be continuous when, indeed, it is obvious that a breath must be taken. Some composers or editors go so far as to prolong a note by a dot in the musical notation and then to contradict it by writing a comma for a breath.

No one thinks it necessary to tell a child to fill his lungs before he begins to howl; or, at a later date in his life, to point out that there must be air in the lungs before he begins to speak. Thus every one really knows the rule for breathing during a song, namely that a breath must be taken before a *verbal* phrase is started.

If the composer writes his musical phrases so that this is difficult or impossible, so much the worse for the composer, for even the most amphibious of singers has to come up to breathe occasionally. In this connexion, however, even the best of composers have to be edited to some extent, and it is true also that great song-writers vary considerably in what may be called the instinct for verbal phrasing.<sup>1</sup>

Since rhythmical 'landmarks' are defined by the *incidence* of the note, it follows that in this connexion its duration is of minor importance; i.e. one may play a waltz measure either *sostenuto* or *staccato* without disturbing the dancing. From which it follows again that this editing for breathing purposes consists in cutting short the duration of the last note of a phrase so that the first note of the next one may not be late. Often there is no time to do more than just to touch the last note and snatch a breath immediately.

Another small problem that the composer often sets

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Ernest Newman has brought out this point very clearly in his comparison of the song-writing of Brahms and Wolf.

the singer is to give him a short verbal phrase, with plenty of time to take a breath before it, followed immediately by a long phrase with no rest in front of it. The obvious solution is to take a full breath before the short phrase so that only a very short time is needed between the two phrases to refill the lungs. Want of attention to such details causes just that very slight displacement of accent which is sufficient to make any singing rhythmically ineffective.

A song which is uncomfortably phrased for the singer is by no means necessarily a bad one. No one need condemn Schumann's 'Die Rose, die Lilie, . . .' merely because a full stop is crowded in between two consecutive semiquavers, and because there is one rest, of a semiquaver only, throughout the whole song. Nor need one refuse to sing 'Slumber, beloved', from Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* because there are twenty-eight bars without a rest.

The general conception of a song is of more importance than the details of its phrasing. A skilful singer can make a success of a song which is well conceived but badly phrased by the composer; but he cannot succeed with one where these merits and faults are interchanged.

It is best for the singer to deal with all these difficulties in practice by learning the music and the words separately. It has already been suggested that the melody of a new song—or of an old one for that matter—should be learnt as a vocal exercise by using the voice as a musical instrument. The words should also be studied carefully, and read aloud till they are known by heart and can be made to sound intelligible and interesting without the aid of the music. If the singer cannot make a success of these feats when tried separately, he is not within measurable distance of making their combination interesting to other people, however much he may enjoy the attempt himself. When these two sides of the art are well mastered separately the difficulty of their blending, which is really the essence of the art of singing, seems to be overcome without any special conscious

effort—except that which is the natural outcome of an imperfect technique, for one cannot arrange with the composer to have one's favourite note and favourite vowel-sound coinciding at the climax of each crescendo.

The realization that there are certain parts of the music which must not be interfered with leads to that unconscious anticipation which prevents one from taking a breath just at the moment when it is necessary to begin a phrase. On the other hand, a careful attention to the intelligent and unaffected presentation of the words brings about the realization that vocal music is subtly different from instrumental music, and almost always requires a more flexible interpretation. As we have seen before, in passages where the syllables of commonly recurring words are written to be sung to notes of which the duration is nominally equal, the music must not insist on being taken too literally; for indeed the amount that it has to give way is usually so small as to be imperceptible by anything except some mechanical recording apparatus.

The question will certainly be asked here, 'How is it possible, or why should we trouble, to make differences in duration which are not directly recognized as such?' The answer is that these minute differences are not made on the one hand, or recognized on the other, by thinking about differences of duration, but by thinking of the sound of familiar words.<sup>1</sup> In the visual world one has no difficulty in distinguishing immediately between two friends whose faces are somewhat similar, but one would be very hard put to it to say by how much the face of one was broader than that of the other, or which had the longer nose.

The mention of an independent method of measuring the exact equality of time-intervals brings us back once again to the question of rhythm and regularity. The

<sup>1</sup> 'The mind in the poetic experience responds to subtler niceties than these, too slight indeed to be at any moment objects of distinct consciousness, yet become considerable in their aggregate influence.' Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*.

business of the musician is not to play metronomically in time, but to play in a way that is satisfactory to the listener's expectation of regularity. This, so far as the beats of a bar are concerned, is not satisfied by exact mechanical equality unless the beats are all of exactly the same loudness.

We are once again confronted with the interesting paradox that it is not possible for any one to appear to play in time without actually playing out of time. A series of exactly equidistant beats can only be divided into groups (and equal grouping is the essence of rhythm) for the ear<sup>1</sup> by making certain beats louder than others. This of course is the conventional accent on the first beat of the bar. As soon as this is done, however, the duration between the beats no longer sounds equal. Experiment shows that an accented beat tends to make the duration of the preceding measure appear shorter. Musicians and singers with any skill had discovered this fact long before it was confirmed by experimental psychology, and had learned to delay accented beats sufficiently for them to fit in correctly with their own and their hearers' desire for that particular kind of aesthetic satisfaction. There is no doubt that the ear is sensitive to extremely minute variations of such 'suspenses', and, although they are not interpreted directly as differences in time-duration, their artistic effect in the aggregate is enormous.

We need not, however, have recourse to the apparatus of the psychological laboratory in order to clear up certain difficulties with regard to time and rhythm, for the muscular sense gives us an independent method of judging equality of time intervals. Some people who are poor musicians (as the term is usually understood) are good dancers, and the criticisms of such people about the performance of dance music are as valuable as those of the more musical. Dancing and music (or some kind of ear-stimulation) have always been very closely connected. The physiological and psychological

<sup>1</sup> For the eye it is done by bar-lines.

facts connected with this do not matter for the moment, since there is a practical reason for it.<sup>1</sup> If a number of people are required to execute movements in time with one another, it is easier to conduct them by sound than by sight, for the sight method as a rule would necessitate their all facing in the same direction.

A waltzer is not upset by dotted crotchets, although his feet are moving regularly in time, or nearly so. He does not expect the individual beats of the musical accompaniment to coincide with the beats of his feet, in fact he would probably find it dull if they did. But no one could dance at all comfortably if the bars of a waltz are not very nearly of equal length. The reason for the two-bar unit previously suggested as most suitable for the waltz will now be clear. If we are beating sets of three beats regularly with alternate feet, one bar will have two lefts with a right in between and the next will have two rights with a left in between. That is to say, there will be a group of six steps before the pattern of muscular sensations re-commences with the left foot on the strong musical beat of the bar. Thus in good waltz-playing there should every now and then be made clear a subtle distinction between the odd and even bars. Thus:



<sup>1</sup> People who naturally remember things by ear (as opposed to the visual type) usually have strong muscular memories. The sensations of muscular tension in the organs of diction are for obvious reasons associated much more with sound than with sight in all normal people.

Waltzes played in such a way tend to go 'with a swing'—which phrase is a colloquial way of expressing the satisfaction felt from the correlation of the muscular and auditory sensations. When played with a steady equal accent on the first beat of every bar they tend to become jerky and monotonous to dance to, although certain eminently satisfactory musical effects can be obtained from the shorter rhythmical unit.

It is characteristic of the world of art that small physical differences such as those that we have been discussing are often responsible for very large psychological effects. If we tried to express the time differences between good and bad rhythm in seconds, it would come to a very small fraction indeed, whereas the difference in the pleasure given by the two kinds of playing is recognized without the slightest difficulty. There is a simple enough explanation of this discrepancy between the apparent size of the cause (measured in one way) and that of the effect (measured in another), the gist of which may be understood by considering whether the throwing of a stone will cause an avalanche.<sup>1</sup> It can easily be seen that this will happen when several other 'causes' are ready to operate.

Any attempt—at least such has been my experience in discussion—to narrow down or define the meaning of the word 'rhythm' is liable to be met with objections of the nature of 'Oh, but rhythm means much more than that'. Lewis Carroll's character, Humpty Dumpty, took up the same attitude towards words, and we may fittingly borrow Alice's reply: 'The question is whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.' For in fact the word 'rhythm' like the word 'art' has been tired out and spoilt by being asked to do too much. Any one can see that the time-pattern of a bar of music is not the same thing as the regular reiteration of this pattern, and further, that the psychological effects of these physical causes are different from the causes themselves.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter III.

In this chapter the meaning of the word has been narrowed down on the assumption that the sincere student of vocal or instrumental music is less concerned with enthusiastic descriptions of the psychological effects of a certain art-technique than with a knowledge of methods of obtaining such effects. High sounding panegyrics undoubtedly have the great virtue of firing a pupil's enthusiasm, but they do not in themselves provide him with any material upon which to work.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SOME PRINCIPLES OF TRAINING

IN the following chapter the word *voice*<sup>1</sup> is used for an instrument or mechanism except where otherwise stated. As it is commonly used also for the sound produced by this mechanism, it might be objected that in whichever sense the word was used the compound term 'voice-training' could have no meaning, because you cannot train an instrument, but only the user of it; nor can you train a sound. But looked at in the right way the term has a certain merit, for it brings out the point that the voice differs from all other musical instruments in being composed entirely of parts of the human body. In brass instruments the lips supply, and in wood-wind control, the initial vibration; all the rest is independent.

This difference introduces factors that make arguments about the voice by analogy with other instruments particularly dangerous. Such considerations are often overlooked by those who occupy themselves with the theory and practice of voice-training. Even this is not the end of the matter, for the voice is also unique in its method of control. All other trained muscular mechanisms achieve their co-ordination by the sense of touch (entirely of course in the case of the blind) or by the sense of sight.

Part of the vocal mechanism must be, and all of it should be, under the control of the ear. Voice-training is fundamentally ear-training, though there are occasions, chiefly in articulation, when assistance can be given by touch or sight.

Phonation, i.e. the actual production of sound by the voice, is an instinctive action, in the sense of a complicated action performed with complete precision with no previous training. It is indeed the second thing that

<sup>1</sup> See also Chapters VII and XI.



a normal new-born baby does—the first being to fill its lungs with the necessary air. The subsequent controlled variations of this primary raw material of sound are classified as articulation, and these are learnt by the child partly in a haphazard way and partly by imitation. The muscular movements in the larynx that are necessary for phonation are not accompanied by any conscious feeling of contraction, so that these muscles can only be contracted by thinking of a sound, not by thinking of a movement in terms of sight or of strain. The movements necessary for articulation, however, are accompanied by consciousness of contraction and by sight ideas of movement certainly as far as the jaw, lips, and tip of the tongue are concerned. A child who is learning to talk will often, besides listening, carefully watch the movements of your mouth. These facts have an important bearing on the training of the voice in the adult.

But though assistance in the initial stages may be given by other senses, the final object of training is to establish associations between the ideas of sound in the auditory memory and the sensations which correspond to the actual emission of the sound.

The voice has one great advantage over other instruments in that a great deal of its technique is presented to us gratis by nature. Perhaps this is not a completely accurate way of stating what is meant, because it is doubtful whether nature presents us with the power of singing intervals that we have not heard sung or played a good many times. The matter can, however, be made plain by taking a particular comparison. A child who decides to learn the violin will obviously have to have a clear auditory idea of the sound of a scale before he can play it in tune and even then it will take him a considerable time in careful conscious practice before he is able to train himself (by means of numerous tactual and muscular sensations) in the orderly co-ordination that is necessary before the scale can be played accurately at a moderate speed. The child with an equally correct

ear who decides that singing is good enough for him will arrive at the same degree of technical ability very much quicker—provided that he is not surrounded, as he often is, by people who sing their intervals like the howling of a cat.

We shall see later what very great training value can be got by listening to good singers, and we shall also see that the listening has to be tempered with a great deal of intelligence and enough knowledge to enable one to analyse accurately the various components of style.

Most students of singing listen a good deal to other singers with a reputation—but too often in a jealous frame of mind that leaves a clear memory of some fault they have been warned against and very little memory that is of any constructive use. Sometimes, on the contrary, the listening is done too much in a hero-worshipping mood; and as great singers' voices and mannerisms are easier to copy than their virtues (the ease of successful mimicry depends largely on this) the enthusiastic amateur who learns in this way often achieves no more than a medley of mannerisms which is a very unflattering caricature of his models. However, we will assume for the moment that we are considering students endowed with the intellectual balance that makes self-education possible.

For certain reasons depending primarily upon the nature of the sound-producing part of the vocal instrument, and to some extent also upon the complications introduced by articulation, clean intervals are difficult to sing; so that the beginner may seek for a long time among *singers* before he finds a model worthy to be followed. On the other hand, in this particular matter good instrumentalists will provide him with an ideal which is vocally nearly unattainable.

The singer who does not frequently listen to good string, clarinet, and flute playing is foolishly neglecting a first-class method, and a very pleasant one, of educating the ear. In fact, scales and exercises for flexibility regularly and frequently done without a thorough

previous ear-training of the kind we have just been discussing are liable to be largely a waste of time, or even worse, because they often stereotype an attitude towards the instrumental side of singing that persists throughout life. The normal training of the normal singer, professional or amateur, proceeds precisely along these wrong lines, and so it comes about that lack of accuracy in attack and lack of clean-cut intervals—usually too subtle to be recognized as singing out of tune—becomes the ordinary listener's idea of what is meant by singing—it is what he expects, and what he gets.

Singing as an art suffers terribly from its complexity: there are so many parts that may be good or bad. A really fine voice and exceptional dramatic powers often disguise very serious, and, incidentally, quite unnecessary, faults in the musical parts of singing. Such singing to an entirely unsophisticated audience (one not trained to take up certain psychological attitudes under the combined influences of a concert-hall, a grand piano, and dress clothes) might easily suggest the less poetic concomitants of a rough sea-passage or the vocal technique of the smaller domestic carnivores. In fact—though it may sound funny, as the statements of people in deadly earnest often do—if certain small sections of highly pitched vocal passages from a gramophone record of an opera were excised from their context and a class of earnest psychological students were asked to identify the corresponding sounds, I am convinced that some of them would say 'cats'. It was perhaps with some idea of escaping from this bestial technique that human beings invented an art in which the sounds remained constant in pitch and then changed by a definite sudden step, but now the swing of the pendulum or rather that of the operatic conductor's baton has brought us back to nature.

When we pass on to the other part of ear-training necessary for the rapid attainment of a fine vocal technique, namely the control of quality and intensity

in tone-production, we find that a precisely similar principle applies. It is again likely to be waste of time, or worse, if exercises for the development of the voice along these lines are proceeded with before there is a clear mental ideal of the quality of sound required. Here it is absolutely necessary that good vocal models should be found and listened to as often as possible. Unfortunately it often happens that people with voices of great beauty are very bad singers, as far as the musical and artistic side of the matter are concerned, and it is here that a very careful analysis of the good and bad sides of a performance is necessary. When this has been made, the attention and memory must dwell on what is good.

There are some interesting difficulties to consider here. The beginner, especially among the more highly educated English-speaking classes, often starts with an entirely wrong ideal of beautiful vocal quality. It is not sufficient that a voice should be purely musical or aesthetically beautiful, because the voice in song is more than a musical instrument, and it is not too fanciful a way of putting it to say that nature seems, as far as tone-production is concerned, to resent its being used purely as a musical instrument. The thin throaty tone that some tenors produce is often a sound of considerable musical beauty, and if an instrument could be made to produce such a tone consistently there is no doubt that composers would find it of great use in an orchestra. But as a *vocal* tone it has two great disadvantages; one physical, the other artistic. It is almost invariably produced at the expense of a strong contraction of the swallowing muscles. Now the normal use of the swallowing muscles consists in a strong contraction lasting a very short time and then a rest. If they are kept contracted for some time during singing they become very tired; the throat aches, and, without going into further detail, the freedom of the whole act of singing is interfered with. These things however might be supported with patience if there were to be any artistic reward at the end of it. But

the tone so produced is incapable of carrying with it any suggestion of what may be called the larger moods and emotions, and even when it is very 'sweet' musically it is liable to become very monotonous. As a final argument for weaning those who hanker after this kind of tone one may mention that those who normally produce a fuller vocal tone, without this bunching of the muscles at the back of the mouth, can always produce this particular 'sweet' tone at will.

To return, however, to practical matters: one of the greatest helps towards producing freely a full tone is to listen as often as possible to those who can do it. The fact has to be faced that, whether as a conversationalist or as a singer, every one is condemned to hear the sound of his own voice more than that of any other person, so that he cannot be too careful about the sounds he hears it making.

The educated English-speaking person usually has difficulty with his sound-production for song. The difficulty is no doubt partly due to the fact that a loud full-blooded tone of voice is not regarded as being in the best of form. This leads to a thin restrained tone of voice in conversation, so that the articulation of words comes to be associated with that tone of voice in singing. Many beginners, therefore, would be well advised to do their tone-producing exercises on vowel-sounds entirely dissociated from words, and to begin learning songs in a language they have never talked; and for this particular purpose it matters not in the least whether they understand what they are singing about—it is a means to an end, and the end is that on those happy occasions when they do know what they are singing about they shall have the power of communicating this knowledge to their audience.

Foreigners are supposed by Englishmen to carry on a discussion of ordinary affairs so that it appears to the insular ear like a violent altercation; and the foreigner might easily retort that the public-school Englishman discusses an exciting day's sport in the manner of

making arrangements for a funeral. Apart from the rights and wrongs, or exaggerations, of these mutual recriminations, it is the first style that makes the most interesting singing; and further, it is certainly true that a freely-produced full tone is much more nearly allied technically to an Englishman's shout than to his speech. Unfortunately this fact cannot be made of much direct use in training, because in mere shouting the voice is used at its maximum intensity, and the untrained voice cannot be used in this way for any length of time without damage. An occasional shout, however, is good for every one; for a shout, though it may not be a very polished sound, contains the foundations of a full vocal singing-tone, and it also tends to free the user from the tyranny of that refined, polite tone sometimes so charming in ordinary conversation and always so boring in art.

One of the most difficult things that a voice-trainer has to do is to convince people with voices that naturally produce a beautiful musical tone that this tone needs altering in any way. The voice—using the term for the moment for the sound produced—is such a personal possession. If any one doubts the difficulty of this problem, he might try the effect of telling a very beautiful girl that her face lacks expression or animation, or one with a beautiful figure that she moves awkwardly. Such things no doubt very often have to be done in schools of acting, but the individual teacher is not protected by an academic atmosphere, in breathing which the learner, in company with other sufferers, is to some extent narcotized against the stings of criticism.

It has been pointed out in an earlier chapter what are the inconveniences and confusions arising from the use of the word 'voice' in two entirely distinct meanings—one for a mechanism and the other for the series of sounds produced by that mechanism. In the first meaning, each individual has one voice (considerably alterable in training, certainly); in the second meaning, every one has several voices. All of these will have an individual tinge which can be recognized by the expert and by

those who have a natural ear for such things. The consistent use of some of these is liable to have a bad effect on the mechanism, but there is no direct relation between the ugliness of a vocal tone and a damaging effect on the mechanism—in fact, some musically dull or ugly sounds by their production form a very valuable exercise for the muscles of the mechanism. Speaking of tone-production alone (the most fruitful causes of voice-damaging will be mentioned presently), it is the ‘pinched’, thin, brilliant tone that strains the voice and hinders its development. With these reservations, the singer should learn to have control of all his voices, and use for the larger part of his daily practice the fullest and most satisfactory tone that he can produce.

The great value of listening to fine voices as often as possible has already been stated. But the student may have to pass considerable periods of time when it is not possible to do this. Nor is it possible to get a great singer to ‘oblige’ just before one’s daily practice. Gramophone-records played on a really fine reproducing instrument such as the E. M. Ginn will, however, cover this difficulty to some extent, but here again these are not always available. The singer is therefore thrown back on his own resources for reminding his ear of that ideal tone which he is trying to cultivate. This should be done on the general principle of always working from the strong to the weak parts of the vocal range both as regards vowel-quality and general quality.

Now, these things vary for almost every individual voice, and this simple fact, that many people find it convenient to ignore, completely invalidates a large number of ‘methods’. In other words, every learner has to make up his own method.

The beginner, as he sings his songs or exercises, will find that there are certain notes in his compass, and certain vowel-sounds, that are produced with greater ease, fullness, freedom, and, in general, what may be called vocal success, than others. There may, indeed, come a time when he can say that a particular note sung on a

particular vowel is the best sound that he can sing. When this time arrives, a superficial common-sense attitude may persuade him to leave that note largely alone and to go on to deal with others. This is absolutely wrong. One's best notes form models for the ear and should always be sung, not less, but more than any others in practice, and almost all exercises for tone-production should be started by singing such notes a good many times.

The explanation of this paradoxical advice—which might seem to be destined to make the good notes very good and leave the poor ones in their original condition—is comparatively simple. When the vocal instrument is a good one, the difference between good and bad notes is almost entirely a matter of co-ordination. In a well produced note, the air spaces in the throat, mouth, and, on certain occasions, in the nose, are arranged to give the maximum assistance to the vibratory motion set up by the vocal cords—for instance, a very slight variation in the position of the free edge of the soft palate will make a great difference to the quality of the tone. But the singer is usually quite unconscious of this as a change in position of the soft palate; he hears the change in quality and is conscious of certain changes in sensation—often in the bones of the nose and face. It is useless to try to control these subtle differences of position in any way than by the ear, and, as a rule, the less they are thought about visually (i.e. by trying to imagine the position of the organs) the better. What happens in the right kind of practice is that the weak notes gradually tend to approximate in quality to the good ones by imitation. It is true that a certain amount of supplementary help may be got by attention to the physical sensations accompanying the production of a good note—hence the invention of such logically absurd phrases as 'singing in the mask', 'forward tone', and so on. But these innocent-looking little catch-phrases, helpful when used with great caution, have brought a veritable phantasmagoria of acoustical absurdities in



their train—nasal resonance, diaphragm-support, and so on—till systems are invented that seem to imply that, if some accident were to deprive a singer of all the organs intervening between the diaphragm and the nose, he would still be able to produce a fine, round, ringing, forward, resonant—and all the rest of the enthusiastic epithets—tone.

But to return once again to practical matters: the observant practiser may notice passages in his songs that always seem to succeed, even though they contain notes that he often finds difficult, or though he may not be in the best form. Such passages should be noted very carefully, for they show that the vocal organs are sometimes coaxed into the correct position for a particular sound when this sound is approached in a certain way. The reiterated singing of such passages finally results in the independent control of such notes apart from the particular context from which they were learnt.

Perhaps the critical reader has become somewhat restive under the implication that the ear can do no wrong. This may have been implied, but it is certainly not meant. Of course the ear can do a great deal of harm. It can instruct the vocal apparatus to do all sorts of things that are not good for it, in the way of pitch, intensity, and manner of 'taking' a note. The ear, for instance, will not tell you that it is better to practise scales downward through a pronounced 'break'; it will probably encourage you to copy the notes below rather than those above the 'break'. Without going into detail, the best way of summing up the method of dealing with difficulties of this kind is to say that, when an attempt to obey the instructions of the ear is attended with a feeling of discomfort or strain, it is a sign that either the note is not suitable for that voice (too high a pitch, for instance) or that, if it is within the compass of the voice, another way of taking it must be tried.

As there are variations in the constitution of the vocal apparatus in different people, so also there are differences in what may be called their psychological composition.

It is probable that the power of calling up the memory of a vocal tone of a particular quality without associating it with some particular context is comparatively rare. But the imagination and the dramatic sense<sup>1</sup> may be called to one's aid to provide associations. In practice, therefore, it is a good plan to take poetic lines of very varying and decided mood and to intone these lines on a single note. Any one with the essentials of a dramatic sense in his mental make-up will automatically produce a tone with a certain amount of heaviness or fullness in it when asked to intone such a line as

'Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!'

and will lighten it somewhat for

'It is a beauteous evening, calm and free.'

Such exercises in contrast are very good ear-training for quality of vocal tone, especially when divorced from melodic aid by being confined to one note. The beginner is liable to cheat himself into supposing that his tone-quality is doing the required suggestion of drama when all he is really doing is to get a meretricious emphasis on important words by a scooping attack, and variations in loudness: whereas the exercise should be done with absolute evenness of pitch and intensity, emphasis being done only by suspense. So that there is meant to be no suggestion in these hints on practising in the early stages that he can do without a skilled and uncompromising critic.

And here, while we are on the subject of vocal tone-quality, which naturally plays a very large part in training for singing, it is necessary to give a warning. It is not my intention to decry foreign teachers who decide to have their chief 'practice' in England, for I have learnt a great deal from some of them myself—not always, it is true, exactly what they thought they were teaching me. But it has to be admitted that if a man has spent a considerable time in England and still talks with a strong foreign accent, especially as far as vowels are

<sup>1</sup> See also Chapter VII.

concerned, that man, however great his musical and artistic powers may be, has an ear which is defective in that part in the world of sound that is most important to the beginner. Unfortunately, a strong foreign accent in a teacher seems to impress the English student. I speak on the subject with humility, as I made my own choice the wrong way round. My first singing-master was a fine composer, musician, and artist, but talked with a strong foreign accent. I learnt much from him, but my voice did not improve at all—rather the reverse, in fact. My second foreign master talked English in a manner so perfect that the only thing that gave him away as a foreigner was that his speech was better than any Englishman takes the trouble to make his own; and my voice improved very largely in quality under his tuition—though he, too, like so many other teachers, guarded himself by a cleverly-woven veil of pseudo-science and mystery lest a too-inquiring pupil should seek to penetrate those parts of the subject that the teacher himself did not properly understand. The other part of the warning is against those English teachers who cannot sing at least one foreign language with a more than passable accent, for they, too, show signs of a weakness in the same part of the hearing faculty.

The singer, however, has many things to learn besides the mere production of good tone and its variations, and such teachers may be very useful in other ways. The point here insisted on is that they are not likely to be the critics that the learner is seeking for in this part of his work. The powers of the ear are very varied, and it does not in the least follow that some one who is a gifted musician—as the term is usually understood—is particularly sensitive to subtle changes of sound-quality.

The unauthorized pronouncements of musicians whose ears are dull in this respect have given rise to much muddle and mischief in the world of voice-training. Luckily, the foreign-language test is an infallible guide here.

While we are on the subject of warnings, there are

other things that have to be considered. It is possible to do a considerable amount of bad practising without doing the vocal instrument any harm. The harm here may consist in stereotyping a certain auditory attitude towards one's own voice—bad enough, it is true, but luckily unattended with any physical damage to the voice. The prohibitions for practice are simple and may be summed up by the advice: avoid all extremes. Do not practise too long, too loud, too high, or too low. Here, those who are not taken in by mere words will complain—and rightly—that such advice as it stands is nearly meaningless.

Let us begin by defining more clearly the last two. When the range of the voice has been tested, it will be found that there are certain notes at the top and the bottom that can be sung somehow, but not with ease and success. Reiterated attempts to sing these properly, instead of making them better, make them worse, and at the same time damage the voice. Such notes should never form part of one's regular daily exercises, though it does no harm to attempt them occasionally, or when they come in a song where the greater part of the work comes in the middle of the vocal range. The other prohibitions may be made more definite by saying that the beginner, at least, should not do exercises for more than about ten minutes at a time; two or three of such short practices should, however, be spread throughout the day. Finally, only occasionally during practice should a definite effort to sing loudly be indulged in, though the possible advantages of an occasional real shout have already been suggested. In general, there is no way of relieving the individual singer of the responsibility of interpreting the word 'too'.

The most important thing to discover about your voice is that part of its range of notes that can be sung with ease for some time—we have no single word for it in English, the Italians call it the 'tessitura'. For practical purposes, it is more than foolish from every point of view—even criminal—to classify voices in any other way.

A tenor, therefore, is one that can sing tenor songs, not necessarily with pleasure to other people, but with comfort to himself. If you are on the look-out for a first tenor for a male voice quartet, the first thing you find out, unless you are completely demented, is whether he can sing the notes of the things you are going to do; not whether he has got what I have heard termed 'a pure tenor quality'—a phrase that is still waiting for definition. The cinema impresario is less concerned, I suppose, with the 'pureness' of his platinum blondes' faces than with their contortions under the combined stimulus of the arc-light and camera. But so long as there are large numbers of people who will listen to some one with interest if he is called a tenor and be rather bored by him if he is called a light baritone, these difficulties will persist. However, it is easy to preserve one's voice under these adverse circumstances: the thing is to *be* a baritone and *call oneself* a tenor:<sup>1</sup> awkward tenor solos, at all events for solo concert work, can always be transposed down a tone, and only about one per cent., or less, of the audience will be any the wiser.

But to return from these showmanship considerations to technical equipment for the art of singing: when this particular range of notes of which we have spoken has been discovered for the individual voice, nearly all the practising-time should be devoted to these notes. Partly as a result, perhaps, of healthy exercise, and partly in connexion with the inevitable process of growing older, for the large majority of singers the 'tessitura' not only increases its range as the voice becomes more trained and flexible, but also moves up bodily, with the result that passages which are difficult at the age of 25 may become easy to sing at the age of 30. This is especially true of English voices, which develop slowly and require delicate treatment in the early stages.

<sup>1</sup> Owing to the discrepancy between supply and demand, choir-masters are often forced to use light baritones as tenors. There is no solution of this difficulty except by sympathy on the part of the choir-master in not insisting on the reiterated singing of any passages which are trying for such voices during rehearsals.

another thing that our imported teachers do not always clearly realize.

For the old-fashioned disciplinarian and educationist there is very little satisfaction to be got out of voice-training, because the easiest and laziest methods are almost always the best. This, however, only refers to that particular part of the subject which we are discussing, for it is obvious that work for repertoire, and opera-training especially, calls for much steady application and discipline.

The point that is being insisted upon is the fact that the development of the voice, when conducted upon perfectly sound principles, involves very little sacrifice of time and energy. It follows a smooth, broad, and easy path bedecked with flowers (of the auditory field) which the wayfarer can enjoy without any accompanying worry that he is frivolously wasting his time. There will not be wanting some one who will point out that there must be a catch somewhere. He is right: there is. The entrance to the path is not at all easy to find. There are a good many others that look much the same at the beginning, but after a time these lead, not to the temple of art, but into a morass of disappointment. The main object of this chapter is to indicate the right gate through the thick hedge of obscurity and mystery that has been allowed—and sometimes encouraged—to grow up in front of the uninitiated.

We started by pointing out how the vocal instrument differs from all others by being entirely composed of parts of the human body. All the parts are susceptible to development and growth, and at one period in the life of a child this growth goes on more rapidly than at any other time. Even the most unobservant, or those whose chief mental preoccupation is to bring uncomfortable facts into line with some vested interest (or preconceived fixed idea), are aware of this fact, and must be capable of drawing the conclusion that it is a time when damage is likely to be done to the voice by careless

treatment. There are certain things, therefore, that should be said about the vocal life of a child. It is not possible here to enter into any general discussion of the physical, physiological, psychological, acoustical, and athletic-training reasons for certain warnings and advice. Some of these, indeed, are inherent in what has gone before, and though the reasons may be complicated, the advice is simple.

The amount of formal vocal training on the physical side that a child should be given is extremely small. The muscular, nervous, and general vocal mechanism of the child and the elastic fresh tissue of which it is made are suitable for sudden yells and shouts, but not for the steady strain and pressure of continued formal practice. Children should not often sing scales and exercises. These should be played, or sung to them if the teacher is one of those rare people who can sing really clean intervals. They should not be made to sing over and over again passages which they do not get note-perfect—these should be played or sung to them over and over again till the *ear* knows them. Sight-reading should be practised quite separately from repertoire (for short periods at a time). And the connexion between sight and sound may be fostered the other way round by musical dictation, which has the advantage of being a complete rest for the voice.

If your child shows signs of becoming a singer, attend to its ear, attend to the clearness of that ear's general musical and artistic experiences and let the child learn either the piano, which will be of great general use, or a stringed instrument, where it has to keep control over its own intonation instead of having the pitch determined for it by the instrument-maker or the piano-tuner.

Breathing exercises aim at capacity and control. It is obviously an asset to a singer to have a large supply of breath and a necessity for him to have the power of using his breath to produce a steady note or a smooth crescendo and decrescendo. The lungs can function

adequately for vital purposes in all the varied positions that the body takes up during exercise and repose. This is sufficient evidence of the extreme complexity and flexibility of the muscular mechanisms that bring about the actions of breathing. In spite of this complexity, two exercises only will suffice to develop and keep in order this important part of the singing instrument.

One of the best exercises for inducing a free expansion of the lungs is well known to those acquainted with Swedish Drill exercises, a great many of which have been adopted for physical training in the Army.

The exercise in question is started by standing in a formal but easy and natural upright position, with the arms and fingers extended vertically downwards; the arms are then moved sideways, outwards and upwards till they are again vertical, the hands meanwhile being rotated slowly so that at the end of the movement the palms again face one another exactly the width of the shoulders apart—this latter, indeed, being implied by the word vertical. While this is going on the feeling in the muscles must be exactly that which every one feels when stretching, i.e. a feeling of effort, but a comfortable one, not a strained one. The movements should be slow and deliberate and the lungs are to be filled during the upward movement of the arms, *not by any attention to the idea of drawing air into the lungs, but by recapturing the general sensations of a deep sigh.* Any conscious attention to the action of particular muscles spoils the general co-ordination of the muscular actions of sighing that nature has taught us from babyhood. Whereas if, while the upward arm movement is going on, the attention is kept fixed upon the feelings of stretching and sighing, the lungs are filled to their fullest capacity with the minimum of conscious effort—a matter of great importance when singing. After this the breath should be allowed to come out slowly and easily as the arms return to their hanging position. This exercise should be done half a dozen times before every singing practice and at odd times



during the day. Its main merit is that it tends to correct inadequate breathing habits induced by a sedentary and 'civilized' life. The reasons for the immense value of this exercise for those who lead a sedentary life depend upon anatomical facts that cannot be entered into here since our main object is to concentrate upon definite practical instructions and the principles upon which they depend. But here is a convenient place to consider an important general principle.

The bodily organs that are used in singing were by no means originally designed for the purpose of singing but for the purposes of certain vital needs. To design exercises for these organs it is necessary to consider their primary functions. The mechanic who is tuning up a car in the garage does not bother whether the engine is going to take the car to Birmingham or Bournemouth. The mechanic who is tuning up the lungs need not consider whether they are to be used for speech, singing, or swimming under water or blowing out a candle. To continue a somewhat mixed metaphor, as far as speech and singing are concerned, the man who climbs into the driver's seat is the ear.

In some schools of singing there used to be, and probably still is, a good deal of talk about the diaphragm in connexion with breathing and tone-production exercises. I certainly was told I had to do something with it—'support the tone on it', as likely as not. Now it is not possible to contract or relax the diaphragm by thinking about sensations in the diaphragm, any more than it is possible to contract the muscles that tense the vocal cords by thinking about sensations in these muscles, for the simple reason that contractions of these muscles are not accompanied by any sensations of contraction. You can make tense the vocal cords by thinking of a *sound* and you can contract the diaphragm by thinking about the sensations of breathing, but these sensations do not come from the diaphragm, they come from other muscles and organs in contact with or near the diaphragm. Luckily, however, 'methods' based on a

mass of physiological and acoustical misunderstandings often do very little harm and sometimes, by accident or by being themselves misunderstood, do good.

Before passing on to the next exercise attention may be called to the extremely beneficial effect that this exercise has upon the carriage of the chest and shoulders—one has only to try it to convince oneself of this. The instruction to a child to hold itself up usually has the effect of making it pull back its head and shoulders in a strained uncomfortable way. Half a dozen of these arm exercises, with the attention upon stretching and sighing, will be incomparably more effective.<sup>1</sup>

A hint towards a good exercise for the controlling part of the breathing mechanism may be got by watching a dog lying down to rest after he has been running about on a hot day. The corresponding human exercise (the tongue need not be hung out!) consists in the rapid passing in and out of a *very* small quantity of breath through the open mouth, or, better still to begin with, through the nose; for it will be found that the exercise can be done much more rapidly and accurately by keeping the attention upon the small oscillating air-current past the nostrils; because here, once again, an attempt to keep the attention upon the muscles that actually control the air upsets the delicate co-ordination required. The average quantity of air in the lungs should remain constant during the exercise and it should be repeated with the lungs at varying degrees of 'fullness'.

It is important not to look upon 'breath-control' as a kind of trick that has to be learnt independently. In singing, the ultimate breath controller is the ear, as, in fact, it is of everything else in the vocal mechanism during singing. It is useless to be able to 'control' the breath by independent means if during singing the ear does not send down the right messages to the breathing

<sup>1</sup> Were it not for the incurable self-consciousness of my fellow countrymen—often dignified by being called a sense of humour—I should like to suggest that all choir-masters should make their choirs do this exercise before a practice.

mechanism. For this reason breath-control should be practised by attempting to sing an absolutely steady note. This should be done at varying intensities: pianissimo, mezzo-forte, and finally, though less frequently in early stages of training, fortissimo. Now it is plainly impossible to imitate a sound without a clear idea of the characteristics of the sound to be imitated. Those who are asked to sing a steady note will often, in fact usually, do no more than try to imitate the steadiest note that they are accustomed to hear their own voices making. An illustration will make clear this fundamentally important part of training. I have known singers who suffered from an apparently incurable unsteadiness of tone; who consistently failed to sing a steady note when asked to concentrate upon doing so. When the attention of these was withdrawn from the idea of singing and they were asked to *imitate* as accurately as possible—as if in response to the request of a child—the exact sound of a clarinet, they succeeded at once in producing a note of the most astonishing increase in steadiness. This shows plainly that the breathing muscles primarily responsible for the production of a vocal tone may be in excellent working order—as indeed they usually are in healthy active people—and yet fail to produce some required effect owing to the absence of clear instructions, or the presence of wrong ones, from the auditory centres. In other words, breathing exercises, however good in themselves, do not give the singer breath-control in his singing without the assistance of the ear.

This is no more than one part of the general principle underlying all training for singing.

*All technical exercises, whether they be for breathing, tone-production, or flexibility, have for their sole aim the providing of an efficient muscular mechanism to put under the control of the ear. As soon as any one begins to sing he should confine his attention exclusively to the world of sound, calling up all his auditory memories and experience to aid him in controlling his voice.*

It may be said that the young singer with an imperfect technique cannot achieve this freedom from preoccupation with technical difficulties. The answer is that a technique may be natural without being perfect: if the technique is natural, this at all events cures the preoccupation to a large extent. It is this preoccupation that accounts for the fact that a good many untrained singers tend to deteriorate when they begin to 'learn' to sing. This need not happen. A natural technique is best attained by building upon the reflex, and other, actions that nature provides originally for vital, not for artistic purposes.

PRINTED 'IN  
GREAT BRITAIN  
AT THE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS  
OXFORD  
BY  
JOHN JOHNSON  
PRINTER  
TO THE  
UNIVERSITY













UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



128 023

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY